

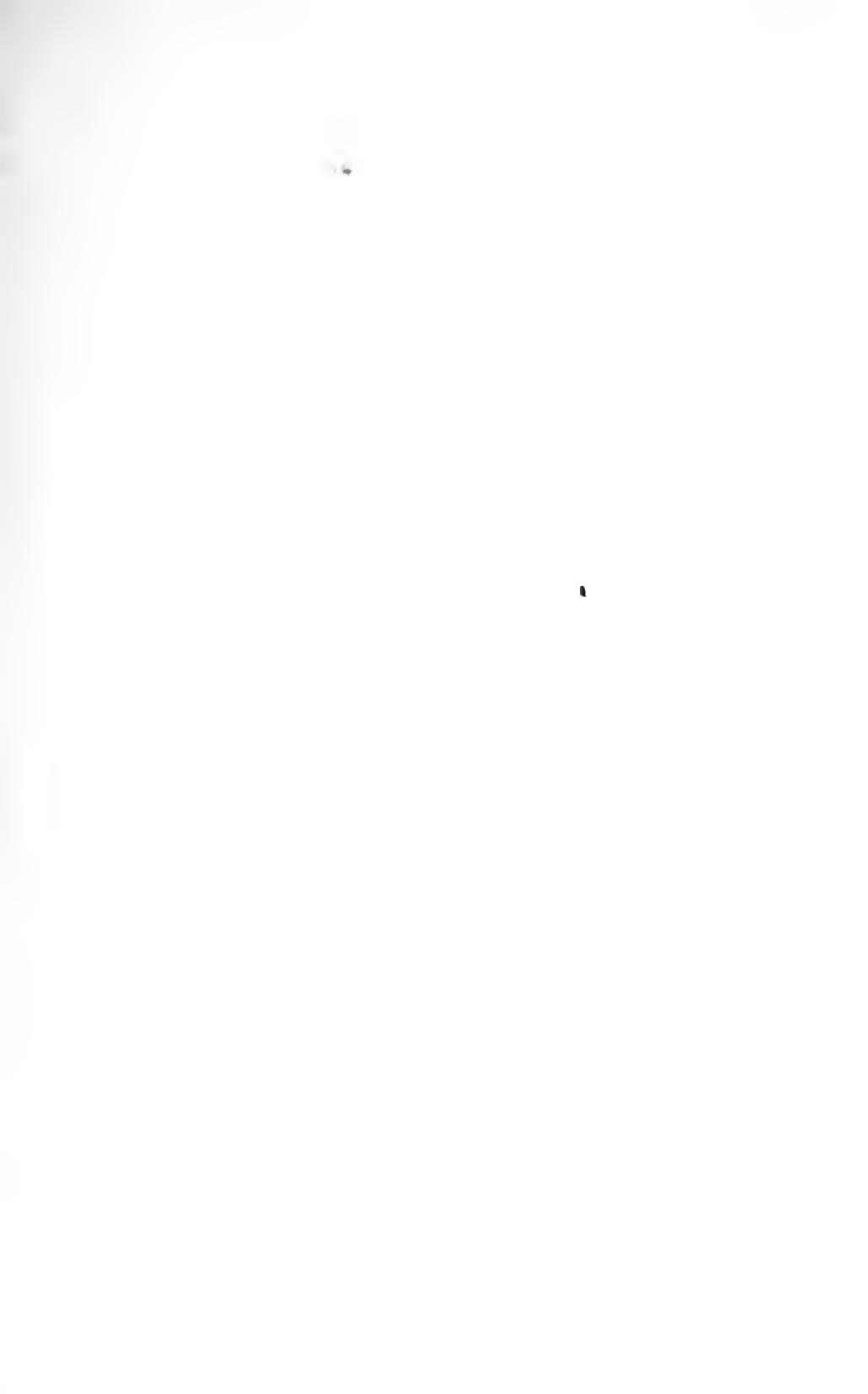


P A I N T E D  
S H A D O W S

 RICHARD  
LE GALLIENNE



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# Painted Shadows



# Painted Shadows

BY

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

*Author of "Love-Letters of the King"*

BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1904

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Published October, 1904

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THE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
CAMBRIDGE, U. S. A.

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*To Agnes*



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THE YOUTH OF LADY  
CONSTANTIA



## THE YOUTH OF LADY CONSTANTIA

LADY CONSTANTIA sat looking out at the summer morning from the windows of her little book-filled bower. The morning was terribly bright and dewy — and O the bloom and the abundance of the world! The cruel exuberance of crowding leaves, the indolent magnificence of the rose! How fresh, how strong, how brimming with sap and fire and the urgent joy and glory of the young year!

Terrible — cruel — yes! for there was that in all this sun-filled cup of fragrant life that almost broke her heart, and brought her head down upon the sill of the open window, and shook with sobs her beautiful shoulders. Her fine hair, still thick and still gold, lay framed in the window, a soft treasure of silken light, and the climbing yellow roses filled it with their scent and their dew.

Presently she roused herself with an impatient gesture, and raising her face, glittering with tears looked out defiantly on the young, young world.

“O my God,” she exclaimed, striking her clenched hand on the window-ledge, “how cruel, how unjust it is!”

Something was on the point of passing away from Lady Constantia for which all her wealth, all her social distinction and popularity, all the fair luxury of her existence, were no compensation. In that old battle of Beauty against Time, at last, at last, after a fight and a succession of victories rarely paralleled in the annals of fair women, she was on the point of losing. As yet no one knew of it but herself. Her maid indeed hardly suspected it—for Mariette had as proud a faith in her mistress’s beauty as a squire in the valour of his knight. And surely that was a triumph; for, hard as it may be for a man to be a hero to his valet, the difficulty is nothing in comparison with being a beauty to one’s maid. Indeed, Lady Constantia Greville’s perennial youth had for years been one of the seven wonders of the fashionable world. Of course, everyone knew that she had recently become a grandmother—O the ingratitude of one’s daughters!—but, looking at her, one felt that, if indeed it was a matter of genealogical statistics, it was not, seriously speaking, a matter of fact. It reflected rather on the precocity of the daughter than upon the age of the mother. One of the many disadvantages of belonging to the

upper classes is the fact that your age cannot be kept a secret. The day of your birth is entered in the stud-book of Burke for all eyes to read, though one has heard of large sums having been offered for merciful misprints. Everyone knew that Lady Constantia Greville was forty-five, though no one looking at her could possibly believe it. Without the evidence of Burke and a grandson, no one would have dreamed of giving her more than twenty-nine. And, so long as she still possessed the reality of youth, Lady Constantia was sensible enough to care nothing for the merely arbitrary registration of her years. But at last the reality was to be hers no more. The silken skin was on the point of failing her, and the clear girl's eyes were soon to grow a little dim.

The glory of her glorious womanhood was standing on the last-lighted frontier of the shadow. Even yet it was summer with her—but a step and it would be the autumn woods, the brilliant autumn tints! Her heart sank, sank, as she thought of it. The long autumn, and then — “the winter sunshine.” She who had so long been splendid spring and triumphant summer — to be complimented on the charm and grace of her passing away: the autumn landscape of a beautiful woman, the gentle loveliness of the dying year! In such phrases her own wit mocked at her own despair. The autumn

tints! O ghastly thought—was she to be compelled at last—she whose beauty had been the very health of flowers, the sweet blood of wholesome strength and country air and fragrant sleep—was she to give herself at last into the hands of the embalmers: the embalmers of beauty with their horrible unguents and spices and all the foul skill which keeps the dead alive, become the painted phantom of herself, and be the astonishing copy of her own girlhood?

Her whole nature revolted at the thought. And yet—the alternative: “to grow old gracefully,” to be one’s daughter’s only rival, some day to be called “sixty years—young”—ugh!—to hear that youth is a matter of temperament and that years don’t count, to be heartily assured that one looks younger than ever: O God, lace caps and silver hair, and “Ah! you will never be as beautiful as your mother was at your age.” O God! God! God!

And Lady Constantia nearly bruised her hand with the force with which she emphasised that tragic rebellion with which sooner or later a beautiful woman must face the stern fact that she is soon—to cease to be a woman. Grandmothers are angels—they are not women. Constantia had been so superbly, so laughingly a woman, and she was as yet conscious of no essential failure in her bountiful womanhood. Her health was still bound-

ing as a child's, and her figure was literally that of a girl. No one as yet, I said, saw what was coming. But she had looked in her mirror that morning and seen — no, it was nothing so obvious as a wrinkle, or any superficial failure of her skin. It was rather a fleeting weariness of tint, a slight deadness or opacity of tone, as if some interior light which illumined the beautiful ivory lamp of the lily was sinking at its centre. It was not, after all, the beautiful skin itself that was failing her, but some mysterious radiance that was retreating from the surface. It was not a matter for the dermatologist. No physical arts were going to avail her. Could it be merely the settling down of the fires of life? Once they were all fairy flame in the cheek, but henceforward they were to burn with a steady, un-radiating glow. O God — could it be because she was forty-five!

Forty-five! . . . yet, after all, as she looked round her shelves and was reminded of the beautiful women of antiquity who had so romantically defied time that they had hardly begun to love at forty-five, she took heart.

After all, there was somewhere in the world the secret of imperishability — if only one could find it. These roses at her window need never fade — if only one knew that secret. Ah! where was it hidden? In what fairy cave, in what dread in-

accessible mountains of the moon, guarded by dragons and gryphons and one-eyed giants, did the simple crystal of the immortal spring bubble up like diamond out of the earth?

She turned over her old folios, with pages yellow as daffodils, and she read how a certain beautiful lady of Crete had prolonged her youth till the age of a hundred and seventy-three, by living on nothing but daisy roots, and how another beautiful lady of Mitylene had lived even longer by drinking only the water of a certain well, and eating nothing but the livers of serpents; she read of still another beautiful lady who suddenly, when she was fifty years old, had by chance gathered a certain wild flower, and pressing it to her nostrils had been so marvellously refreshed by its fragrance that, when she ceased from smelling it, she had suddenly become a young girl. She read how a Princess of Mesopotamia had retained her beauty till she was past ninety by bathing each morning in the milk of unicorns, and had suddenly grown old and died because no reward she could offer could procure for her another pint of unicorn's milk in the wide world.

She read that the complexion was much benefited by one's listening to the lark as it rose from its nest in the dawn, and that the contemplation of certain stars, particularly in certain months of the year, gave the eyes a marvellous brightness.

The juice of blackberries applied under certain aspects of the moon made the feet small, and much handling of lilies made the fingers white and tapering; and to hear the first nightingale of the year break its shell had a wonderful effect upon the voice.

They were absurd old books, of course — Constantia said; and yet — what if there should be some method in all their picturesque madness? The most potent science of the modern world was but a fulfilment of these magnificently nonsensical dreams of astrologers and alchemists and herbalists. Science indeed had long since ceased to be common-sense, and entered the realms of the supernatural. With wireless telegraphy a mere matter of business — so reliable a mode of communication that lovers can sigh instantaneously to each other around the globe; with witchcraft, otherwise hypnotism, one of the recognised methods of medicine; with surgery an opium-eater's dream, and a dangerous operation a *dolce far niente* way of spending a fortnight — surely the elixir of life became a long-expected, stupidly delayed commonplace of science.

Her beauty had already been prolonged so remarkably beyond the common span of beautiful faces that its endurance alone was almost enough to suggest to her that she was one of those in

secret, if unconscious, communication with those immortal forces that keep the world young forever. If there were forces that could indolently furnish the meadows with their freshness, spring after spring, and with a mere turn of the hand fill the sky with stars and the singing of birds, surely forces that could do so much could do the little thing Constantia asked, arrest those merely parochial activities of decay threatening her beauty — as some citizen maggot dares to take possession of the château of the rose — and lay an authoritative finger even upon death.

Thus the miracle of her beauty set Lady Constantia pondering on possible miracles of its preservation, and she read and listened and watched here and there, and paid heed even to the advertisements of those quacks who batten, as we have just said, on the decay of the rose. That it was a weakness in her she would have been the first to acknowledge — with shame; but this weakness at least she never stooped to: she never gave herself into the hands of the embalmers. She permitted no artists of the surface to approach her face. Her beauty was, so to say, merely the registration of some central sweetness and health and wonder in the world. If her face was lovely, it was because it was fed by deep Artesian wells of beauty, brimming down in the silence and the strength

and the sweetness at the heart of the world. If the beauty-making root was dead, would she — could she — be so cheaply dishonest as to furbish up the dying flower?

Her beauty was too *strong* for that. Her beauty had been a reality too long for her to care to turn its decay into an imposture.

No! — but if . . . if only the root of the rose might be miraculously quickened, so that the slim stems grew soft with their very strength of sun and dew, and put out from their sides little green wings, from sheer might of their freshness . . .

If only some power profoundly vital as a field of corn would only lay its hand upon the root of the rose that was Constantia Greville! And the mere fact of her long-enduring beauty, as I have said, made her confident that such hidden powers must be.

It was this mood of a mind in no way superstitious or hysterical that caused her to pay attention to the stories that came to her, on she could hardly say what wings of hearsay, about a certain Dr. Sibley, whom everybody laughed at, and, so far as she knew, no one patronised, who claimed to have discovered some of the secrets of youth. Dr. Sibley appeared to despise the methods of the charlatan; at all events, he made no use of them, and his name had chanced to get into the papers

as accidentally as if he had merely set a bone with unaccustomed skill.

There was, however, that indefinably informing quality in the rumour that made Lady Greville determined to visit him in some sooty address off the Edgeware Road. Much as her beauty was to others, it was far more to herself, and there was nothing she would not do, however silly it might seem to the world, to keep it alive — that is, really alive.

At last she found herself in the horrible little respectable street off the Edgeware Road. She had dressed herself in her plainest clothes, and had ridden in an omnibus, to avoid the chance of recognition. Shrinking with shame, she at length came to the dim but not obtrusively sordid door. With a gasp she rang the bell; and next she was seated in a sepulchral front parlour, dingily neat — mahogany, a marble mantelpiece, and a black marble clock ticking solemnly as if it were keeping time in a tomb. A room less suggestive of “occult” mysteries could hardly have been conceived. Poor Lady Constantia had half expected crocodiles suspended from the ceiling, snakes in bottles, and bundles of dried herbs, and Dr. Sibley she had figured, half laughingly to herself, as a preposterous quack wearing a dressing-gown embroidered with the signs of the Zodiac.

But as the room agreeably surprised her, so did the doctor. He was a short, business-like man, with a rather red nose and a Welsh accent. His clothes and manner were both good, and Lady Constantia, with an inward sigh of thanksgiving, saw that she had to deal with something like a gentleman.

He received her as any other doctor might have done, and tactfully helped her out with her first preliminary explanation. After what she had expected, he was most attractively taciturn. Neither did he launch out into a flood of charlatan exposition, nor, on the other hand, did he laboriously explain that he was no quack. He said nothing whatever about psychic phenomena or astral planes. In fact, beyond a few of the usual medical commonplaces, he said hardly anything at all. He asked Lady Constantia a few questions such as he might have asked if she had sought his advice for some customary ill of the body: Were her father and mother living? How many children was she the mother of? Appetite? Exercise? Sleep well?—and so on.

Then he looked at her quietly for a while, pondering. Suddenly he said, as simply as though he had been prescribing iron and quinine:

“Yes! I can make you young again . . .”

Lady Constantia began to murmur her thanks.

“Wait a moment,” he went on; “I can make you young again, as young as you were at twenty-five . . . for ten years . . . ”

Lady Constantia gasped.

“Listen . . . for ten years . . . *but*, and now listen again, at the end of that time, on the very last hour of the ten years, you will suddenly become absolutely old, older than you could ever have become in the ordinary course of events. From twenty-five you will shrink to eighty in a moment. It is for you to consider whether you will grow gradually towards fifty-five, or whether you will choose to be twenty-five years old for ten more years and then suddenly be eighty. If I were you, madam,” added the doctor, from whom Lady Constantia had concealed her rank, “I would remain as you are. Even when you are fifty-five you will look very little older than you do now.”

Lady Constantia thought a long while. Presently she turned to the doctor.

“May I ask about your methods?”

“I have no methods.”

“No methods!”

“None that you will know of.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I mean that, if you agree to employ my services, you and I need never meet again. In a month’s time from now your beauty will have come

back to you ; in a month's time you will be a girl again."

"But how do I know that this is true?"

"I can give no guarantees beyond my promise."

"And your fee?"

"One thousand pounds a year — till the end of the ten years."

Lady Constantia laughed scornfully, but the doctor's manner was so quiet and simple that she was convinced in spite of herself. After all, what were ten thousand pounds in exchange for ten years of her lost beauty ; and if the doctor was a quack, well — she was rich. So presently she turned again to the doctor.

"I agree," she said.

"But remember!" said he, "the ten years will end . . . and what then?"

"I will pay that price, too," said Lady Constantia. Then she added, "Shall I pay you now?"

"Yes! please," said the doctor, as quietly as though he had said, "A guinea, please."

And Lady Constantia, who had come armed for some such contingency, paid him out ten hundred-pound notes. The doctor made out a formal receipt, and as he handed it to her, added: "A month from to-day! Thank you. Good afternoon."

And Lady Constantia was once more in the dim

little street. She turned a moment to look at the insignificant house. Could it be true? Surely she must have been dreaming!

At the beginning of the ninth year Lady Constantia found herself face to face with a terrible ordeal, a tragic temptation that had never entered into her plan of life. Hers had always been a strange heart, a kind heart and an affectionate, but it had always seemed incapable of a real passion. She had loved her husband in a sisterly way, and his death had caused her genuine regret; but neither he nor she had ever mistaken their marriage for a romance.

Suddenly, however, at the age of fifty-four she was to be stricken by the veritable arrow tipped with honey and tears, the true and terrible love of the poets.

Adjoining her country home, a certain beautiful young man had recently come into his lordship. He was still a mere boy, scarcely twenty-two, and of a singular grace of nature; manly indeed, and yet dreamy; already a soldier browned with the sun that shines on English battles in far un-English lands; but, as with a soldier-poët ancestor of his, his eyes were somewhat subject to the influence of the stars.

Lady Constantia had known him as a mere baby,

— for was he not ten years younger than her own daughter, who had long since come to look older than her supernatural mother? — and he had grown up in full possession of the legend of Lady Constantia's eternal youth; and, when he was old enough to think of such matters, the poet in him had been fascinated by its romance. It had sent him dreaming of Helen of Troy, of Iseult, of Cleopatra, and, often as he looked at her, while yet a bookish dream-filled boy, he had wondered if she would be young still when he had grown up, so young that she would not laugh at him — if he should still love her. And, year by year, Mortimer Fanton had grown more and more to be a man; he had, it might almost have seemed, raced to be a man — that he might catch up to Lady Constantia before she ceased to be a girl. And, year by year, there was no change in that unfading face. Year by year the clock struck the hour for the beauties of this and that season in bitter rotation, but the beauty of Constantia Greville laughed at all the clocks of time.

By the time that Constantia Greville was fifty-four Mortimer Fanton had qualified to look her slightly elder brother — a boy still, but quite old and tanned enough, and with a moustache firmly enough established, to play the protecting member of the family, if need be. Seeing the two together,

unprejudiced by previous information, you would have thought it the most natural thing in the world that two such beautiful young people should fall in love with each other. For whatever the miraculous art may have been which had given Lady Constantia her youth, it was, at all events, an art that concealed itself. There was no smallest suggestion of the *tour-de-force*; and her youth was so real and fresh that to say she was fifty-four seemed as silly as saying the like of a newly opened flower. All her technical "age" proved was the slander of chronology.

And the older she grew—in Burke, but nowhere else—the more Mortimer Fanton loved her. He loved her first, because she was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, and next because she appealed to that romantic sense in him, which, as a rule, English girls but imperfectly satisfy. Her beauty, like that of the beautiful ladies of old time, was already touched with the romance of immortality. She was to him like one of Villon's "dead ladies" whom it had been his strange fortune to meet in a meadow of Paradise. Her age, so called, had not made her old, but only immortal. When sometimes he caught sight of her at a distance walking in her park, he said to himself: "To think that I have seen Queen Mary!"

Though the dawn still bloomed in her cheek,

over her head there hung already the crescent moon of legend. Should he meet Queen Guinevere in a green glade some morning, would he give a thought to her age? Would he not rather love her the more because she was still a wild rose after a thousand years?

All men think they love beauty, and their matrimonial failures usually represent youthful æsthetic ideals which they have outgrown. Their wives too often are like pictures by popular artists which appealed to them as boys, and which in a rash moment of inexperienced admiration they hung upon their walls — pictures which they have n't the heart or the opportunity to take down.

But Mortimer Fanton really loved beauty. As a boy, reading his dreamy books, he had thought of woman as the beautiful princess riding on a white palfrey in the middle of the dark wood of the world, so beautiful that a man would willingly die to look once at her face and kiss her hand; but beautiful, always beautiful, and nothing more — what more could there be? He had never stopped to think how she would talk, what she would say or do, when she stepped down from her palfrey, and her women met her at the iron door of the castle on the edge of the forest. To him she was a white flower journeying upon a white palfrey; she was woman, the white flower of the

world; and he dreamed of a man as a being worthy to win and strong to guard that white flower.

If you see a lady riding through the woods, like a holy candle borne with a great hush of holiness down the glades, how long do you wait till you offer her your heart and your lance and your life? Do you wonder: How, and How, and How? Do you wonder anything at all, except: O God, is it possible she will take me for her servant? Is it possible that some day she will give me the deeps of her eyes?

Other men may ask more — O surely let us say *less* than this — but Mortimer Fanton . . . well, he knew of nothing more to ask. When he was still a child he had seen the most beautiful lady in the world; he had been told she lived only a few meadows away — he measured the distance by acres of cowslips; he had played truant that he might be hidden in the fern to catch a glimpse of her face passing like a dove through the trees; and now that he had become a man, and had been here and there and used his eyes about the world, that face of his boyhood was still the only face among women for him. Still he would watch her face going up the wood like a spray of hawthorn carried in the hand, still her beauty was to him the supreme prize of all the prizes of the world.

And the day came when he dared to tell her of all this, and when she hardly dared to listen.

To her his love was more wonderful and more to be desired than he, or anyone but a woman, could dream of. She was an old, old woman, and here was a boy bringing her so beautiful a love. How few out of all the women of time had been made such an offering! And the victory was the more real because she knew that Mortimer's love for her was not founded on a mere fancy. The beauty he worshipped, she said proudly to herself, as she looked in her mirror, was real beauty. Though its time was growing so short, though it had endured so many years, it was still the untricked beauty of a girl. It was by no cheap illusions of the boudoir that she had won Mortimer's love. He might kiss her cheek, but he would only kiss it a deeper pink, and there was nothing of all her beauty that could do other than welcome the challenge of his eyes.

Yes! for the wonderful love he was giving her — she would be giving him in exchange no counterfeit. She could give in exchange a woman no less beautiful than his love. She, a woman of fifty-four, dare draw herself up and say: "Am I not beautiful, am I not as *young* as any girl?" Ah, the beauty; but ah, the terror of the temptation!

Dare she tell him that this beauty had scarcely

two years to live? . . . and then she covered her lovely face with her hands. Would he love her still . . . if he knew? Would he pay half the terrible price of the beauty he loved? How could she run the fearful hazard of confession? . . .

For days she had been pondering it all. Of course, when he had spoken, she had put his love away, gently, laughingly, motherly . . . but he had not missed a certain wild something in her eyes which he could not know for gratitude, and he had not altogether despaired.

By chance one morning he met her near a grove of hawthorn just then in fragrant flower. Her eyes were so full of the dream of him at the moment that she could not help his seeing; and he dared to take her hand and beg her to sit down awhile and let him look in her face.

She sat down, like any country maid, in the thick grass, and he held her hand gently, and looked at her, as if her face was a vision that would only last so long as he kept his eyes upon it.

“Well?” he said after a while.

“Mortimer, it cannot be.”

There was silence again for a moment.

“But it shall be,” said Mortimer, guiding his speech by the lovely star-chart of her face. “It *shall* be.”

“Listen,” said Constantia; “suppose my beauty were suddenly to perish — suppose it should happen that in a year, say two years’ time, I should suddenly wrinkle up, and all my years fall upon me in a moment, like a shower of ashes? . . . ”

Mortimer laughed sceptically.

“Yes! but *suppose* . . . And listen . . . for all my strange youth, I am an old woman. Even though my beauty should last, in a very few more years I must die. You are still a boy. When you are thirty, Mortimer, it may well be time for me to die . . . ”

“I love you,” said Mortimer, for answer.

“Yes! But would you love me if you *knew* that in two years I should look really old . . . or, Mortimer, would you love me if you *knew* that in two years I have to die? . . . ”

“I love you — there can be no conditions. Anyone we love might die . . . would two years seem too short a time to be married to you — Constantia? . . . ”

For the first time he dared to say her name.

“If I say that I *know* — know as I know a date in the almanac — seriously know — that in two years I must die, do you still wish me to be your wife? . . . ”

“How can you ask me — even supposing all that you say is anything but dreams? . . . ”

“But tell me . . . you would not think I had cheated you if I slipped away and died—you would not think that I had not played fair . . . ”

So Constantia had already determined to quiet her conscience by a desperate resolve, and with the two years of her beauty that were left to her buy the only love she had ever known; and, like any other lover, Mortimer was bent on taking the always mysterious risks of love.

The two years were growing terribly near to their close. But a few weeks of her beauty remained, and then she must either keep her promise to herself and die while she was still young to look upon, or be hideously revealed to her husband in all her withered years. Her heart stood still with terror at the thought. O was there no other way! The love Mortimer had given her, precious as it had seemed in its first giving, had grown still more precious with time—more devoted, more gentle, day by day. Her heart ached to see how he loved her, and often she tried to quiet her conscience by reminding him of what she had said the day she had promised to be his wife. The time was drawing near, she would tell him again and again, when she must go away from him—when she must die. But his only answer was to smile tenderly at her, and take her glorious face in his

hands, and kiss her eyelids, soft and full and silken as the petals of a rose.

“No,” he laughed, “it is you that will soon have a queasy old fellow on your hands, to humour and nurse and put up with — and perhaps, who knows, some dashing young person will be coming along and stealing your love from the tiresome nonogenerian in the chimney corner? I found a grey hair this morning — think of that! But this dear hair — ah, how thick and golden it is . . .”

“Don’t jest, O don’t jest, Mortimer,” Constantia cried, cowering into his arms. “It is more serious than you know. I told you two years ago that it must come, and I know now it is coming; I hear it coming nearer, moment by moment . . .”

“Well, love,” he said, petting her soothingly, as one soothes a child, “if it comes, we shall meet it together, shall we not? I will be by your side, dear. I must be always there. I could not live without you, Constantia . . .”

“No, no,” Constantia exclaimed in horror, taking her face away from him and covering it with her hands. “No, no! I must face it alone — all alone, Mortimer . . .”

“That will be selfish of you, dear, if you do . . . But, come, let us go for a ride, and blow away these dark thoughts. I love you so, my Constantia. Don’t you understand how I love you?”

He meant that nothing could happen that could change his love for her — no! not even if her beauty were suddenly to die.

As the days went one by one, striking, as it seemed to Constantia, some dark gong in the sky, she more and more beat herself like some beautiful bird against the cage of her destiny. O! was there no other way? O! was there no other way?

Surely the strange man who had done so much for her could do still more. She would go to him and offer him — O! half her fortune — anything — for just a few more years, five years — — one year even — O! even a few more precious days.

So, one afternoon, she found herself again in the dingy omnibus, once more she was in the dingy street, once more she had nervously rung the bell of the dingy little house, and sat hearing the same clock ticking the minutes to the same furniture.

And when the doctor at length entered the room he seemed as unchanged as all the rest. She had not seen him all the years since her last visit. The punctual transmission of his fee, each unchanging year, had been their only communication.

He received her in the same quiet way, with the same superb, yet unostentatious, imperturbability. His manner had the simplicity of a great scientist, master of some secret of nature, to you so mysterious, but to him a comparative commonplace of his laboratory. He manifested as little surprise or self-gratulation over the wonderful girlhood which entered his room — though Lady Constantia looked fully twenty years younger than when he had last seen her — as any other doctor when his treatment has turned out as he expected. It was his business to make people young — what would you?

Of course, he knew what Lady Constantia had come to ask of him. It was inevitable that she should come thus, and implore him to work the miracle over again. His patients invariably came back to him near the end in this way, and he had been half expecting Lady Constantia for several days. Therefore, once more he helped her out with her broken-hearted explanation of her visit, and endeavoured to tranquillise the wildness of her appeal; waving aside the sensational rewards she offered him, as though they did not concern a man of science, such as, after all, it is undeniable that he had proved himself.

He said nothing to the point for some time, and was evidently pondering far more deeply than

he had pondered on her first visit. Poor Constantia wistfully watched his face, snatching a wild hope from his withdrawn manner. Then at last he turned to her.

“You are a wonderful woman, Lady Greville,” he said — for she had thrown her name and her entire confidence into the scales of her proffered reward. “Nature at your birth seems to have given you more of her secret life than I realised when I first saw you. I have never met anyone quite like you. You are a very interesting case . . .”

And then the doctor fell to pondering again. It was evident that the lovely face waiting on his word with such piteous intensity was entirely forgotten as he meditated. Then, an unwonted proceeding with him, he rose and paced up and down the room, quite close to the beautiful face, almost brushing it with his coat, so little did he heed it. He pulled at his spare black beard in an abstracted way, and seemed now and again to be talking to himself internally and making calculations, which he punctuated with his head, as they came out right or wrong. At last, with a startling suddenness, he stopped dead in his walk, and as he turned to Lady Constantia, it was evident that he was labouring with suppressed excitement.

“Yes! yes! I see my way!” he said. “Yes! I see my way!”

Lady Constantia fell on her knees hysterically and kissed his hand.

“O! how can I thank you — you strange, strange man! . . . ”

But the doctor somewhat brusquely put her aside, and bade her to be seated and listen.

“Before you thank me, listen . . . As I said just now, you are a very remarkable woman. I saw that at first. For no other woman could I have done so much as I have already done. Remember that Nature is behind all I do — without her help I can do nothing . . . ”

“Yes! yes!” said Lady Constantia, with her hand raised as in prayer.

“But,” the doctor continued, “even with you, what you ask is impossible. It is astonishing to me, indeed, that I can do even what I can do . . . ”

But for the moment the doctor went off again into his calculations, oblivious of the woman so desperately hanging on his every word.

“Yes! I think I can promise that,” he said, coming again out of his reverie. “Yes! I can give you back — *half* your beauty for a time, but for how long I cannot say. It may be five years, it may be ten, it may be . . . Well, I cannot promise . . . ”

“*Half* my beauty . . . ” cried Lady Constantia, sinking back in wonderment.

“Yes! I can do that . . . I see I can do that — and — by heaven . . . ” The doctor stopped short as though he had suddenly seen, indeed, a light from heaven; “excuse me, but I see one way, too, by which all your beauty might come back . . . but that,” he added, “will not depend on me.”

Then suddenly, with a sort of tenderness, he held out his two hands almost gleefully to Lady Constantia, and took hers in a congratulatory way.

“Upon my word, you are a most remarkable case . . . ” he exclaimed.

“But half my beauty . . . what can you mean? and that other contingency you speak of . . . O, tell me more clearly . . . ”

“I cannot, for I hardly know myself. But this much I see, that so remarkably vital are your own original forces of beauty, that I, by certain knowledge and power I possess, which are my secret, can so sustain them that one half of your beauty can be saved to you; and I see, too, that another man holds the secret of restoring the other half. What his power is, or how it may operate, I have no knowledge . . . only I am able to see the possibility. I wish, indeed, Lady Greville, it were

in my power to save all your beauty from the fury of time. Some day I trust that my studies may have taken me so far as to make such beauty live for ever . . . But all I can do now I have told you . . . ”

“ Half my beauty . . . ” said Lady Constantia. “ It sounds strange . . . However, it is something. I accept your offer, doctor. Let me keep half my beauty . . . ” and then she added, “ Your fee, doctor? ”

“ Pardon me, ” he answered, “ but this time you must permit me to treat your case in the disinterested interests of science. It is worth more than money to my studies to have encountered so remarkable a patient. You have already rewarded me with great liberality, and your fees have enabled me to pursue branches of my science which otherwise I should have been obliged to neglect— for my researches are costly beyond those of any other science . . . ”

Lady Constantia endeavoured to over-rule his objections, but it was in vain ; and, though indeed the money was nothing to her, it gave her confidence, as she once more hurried home through the dingy street, that her mysterious doctor was indeed no charlatan, that his strange promise would be kept, and that even that other enigmatic forecast of his might also come true,

Half her beauty . . . what could he mean? And that other half in someone else's keeping — what could that mean? In whose keeping? O if she only knew in whose keeping it was! Would she not go through the world seeking him — give all she had and become a poor woman just to find him, and buy from him that other half?

Half her beauty . . . What could the doctor mean? Half her beauty! Would that suffice to hold Mortimer's love? She was very beautiful. "Half that beauty," she said to herself, as she looked in the glass. "Some women would give much, I suppose, to be even half so beautiful . . ."

Half her beauty! But how would the mysterious mathematician measure and divide? Was she not to die, after all? Would Mortimer love her still with — only half her beauty? Or should she keep her promise, and die, as she had vowed, mysteriously a girl!

The final morning of the tenth year came at last — the last day of her beauty. When evening had come and Mortimer bade her good-night as she went to her room, it would be the last time he would see the Constantia he had loved. . . When the next morning dawned she would be either dead — or changed.

Should she tell him all? Should she throw her-

self upon the mercy of his love? Ah, no! it would be like asking his leave to live, a reprieved felon, existing by his mercy. No, that she could not bear. So by an extraordinary self-command she determined to make that last day the most wonderful of all their days together, and, if indeed it was to be her beauty's setting, her beauty should at least set in unforgettable glory. In this she was able to succeed so well that the day passed for Mortimer in one long adoration of the strange woman he loved. From morning till evening he could not leave her side. Never had the spell of her beauty been so strong upon him.

But though her power over herself held out remarkably, she could not refrain from bidding Mortimer good-night with unusual solemnity.

"O Mortimer," she cried, as she stood encircled by his arms, "look well into my face. If you have loved it — and indeed, my beautiful Mortimer, you have loved it more than it is worth — love it now; for perhaps you will never see it again! . . ."

But her husband deemed that this was but another of those attacks of strange fear that had overcome her of late.

"The day has been long — too long to have been so wonderful, my Constantia," he said. "We are but mortal, after all, and even an immortal like

you might well fall a little faint at the end of such a day." Then, after a pause in which he strove to tell by the strong hands so gently laid on her hair all that words were so poor to tell, he added:

"Constantia, will you never believe in my love — will you never understand how much longer it is than time, how much stronger it is than death. . . . Sleep well, beautiful head, and remember that if evil dreams should come — I am near."

And so Constantia went to her room, and the faithful maid who had grown old in the service of her eternal youth dressed her for sleep. Constantia felt unwontedly tender towards her to-night.

"Mariette," she said, "I am afraid I have not been always so considerate as I should have been. I have long meant to give you this" — and poor Mariette almost gasped at the note which her lady crumpled into her hand. Strangely enough, too, she took the little shrunken woman by the shoulder and kissed her on her hair . . . so that Mariette went away wondering; and when Constantia was quite alone, she softly locked both the doors of the room.

For whatever was to be must be to-night. O, at what tick of the clock was it to befall — at what moment of this fearful night was she — to change? She looked at herself again and again. Yes! she was wonderfully beautiful. How smooth were her

cheeks, how bright her eyes, how round her throat! Half of all this beauty! What could it mean?

At last she lay down in her bed and drew the sheets over her, but she dared not put out the light, and she could not sleep. Her little clock silverly ticked and ticked and ticked, till at last she rose in a frenzy and buried it deep in a drawer muffled away among linen.

But still she seemed to hear it ticking: "Half her beauty — half her beauty — half her beauty. . . ."

And so an hour or two went by, and, in spite of herself, Constantia slept.

Suddenly she awakened as out of a nightmare — and passed her hand involuntarily over her face. What was this! What was this against her hand! The light was still burning. Once more she leaped from her bed, and sought her mirror — and then a piercing shriek smote like the sword of death through the house.

"O my God! Is that what the doctor meant? Is this half my beauty?" and with a scream she fell in a swoon upon the floor.

Horror! Horror! Horror! — what was this? The face that had looked back at her from the mirror was only half her own. The other half was the face of a woman of ninety! . . .

Mortimer, who had slept but fitfully in his adjoining room, sprang from his bed at her cry, and find-

ing the door locked, called on her to open it, but, receiving no answer, he broke it open.

She was lying as she had fallen in front of her mirror, lying on her beautiful girl cheek. All Mortimer saw was the cheek that had withered. For a moment he stood as one might stand in the presence of some supernatural terror. His next impulse was once more to secure the door, and bid the servants who were already seeking admittance to return to their beds. No one should see his Constantia any more but he.

Then, bending over her, murmuring his love, he lifted her up and placed her on the bed; and, as he did so, he saw how much stranger it was even than he had thought, for when Constantia lay on her right side as he had placed her, lo! the face he saw was the girl he had always loved.

“There is still left me half her beauty,” he said, “half that wonderful beauty I have loved. It is not all lost . . . and, even if all should go, Constantia,” he said, speaking as if she heard, though she lay heedless as death, “even if all should go, I would still love you. Thank God, at last I shall be able to make you understand . . .”

And thereon, deep in the silence of his heart, he registered a vow to be, as long as he lived, the faithful priest at the grave of Constantia's lost beauty.

## The Youth of Lady Constantia 37

Lost! Nay, only half lost, and once more he kissed the beautiful girl lying there with her rich hair spread over her faintly flushed cheek.

“Constantia,” he whispered, “I love you”; and holding her softly in his arms, again and again he softly told the sleeping woman how he loved her — how he loved her — how he loved her.

And so the night passed, and the dawn came, and filled the room with strange gold. Constantia had not moved during all the night, but had lain just as Mortimer had placed her. Suddenly she turned, with the deep waking sigh of a healthy child, and became conscious of Mortimer’s arms about her.

“What has happened?” she cried, half remembering, and suddenly sitting up . . . As she did so, Mortimer, too, sprang up in what one might perhaps call a terror of joy.

“Constantia!” he almost shrieked, as he snatched a hand-mirror from her dressing-table. “Constantia! Look!”

But suddenly full consciousness came back to Constantia, and, as she remembered, she dashed the mirror down, so that it broke in pieces upon the floor.

“O Mortimer! Mortimer! Be merciful. I know. I have looked. O God, forgive me — I should have died.”

“But you don't understand, Constantia. See — you shall look —” and he carried the dear form to the great glass; and something wonderful in all his tenderness gave her courage, so that she dared to look . . . and when she looked . . .

Well, it was merely Constantia Greville as she had been accustomed to find herself in her mirror for the last — how many years? She turned one cheek and then the other, but there was no difference . . .

Then in wonder and joy she turned to Mortimer.

“So you were the other man,” she said, throwing her arms about his neck, “and your love was the other half of the miracle.”

THE SHADOW OF THE ROSE



## THE SHADOW OF THE ROSE

### I

**H**AVE you ever considered the shadows of beautiful things, how exquisite they are, how strange, how filled with meanings and messages; and, as well, that they are no less real, when you come to think of it, than the so-called realities by which they live—mysteriously real—real, you may even deem, with a more exquisite reality? The shadows of sunny leaves dappling the long glades of the woodland silence and falling about one like the fairy dies that make the markings on flowers. The blithe silhouettes of darting birds on the window-curtains in early summer mornings. The dreamy flicker of swaying branches across the page in summer afternoons. The shadow of a flower on the wall. The shadow of a beautiful woman on a blind.

I am thinking of shadows, because for a full hour I have been watching the shadow of a rose on my study wall. It is that time of the afternoon when the sunshine is at once richly sensuous and yet haunted as with a spiritual thought—the mo-

ment when the superb physical bloom of the day is at its proudest, yet touched with wistfulness, as with fear of the coming night; the moment when you seem to be waiting for the opening of a door, and a voice secret yet clear.

The rose is very beautiful. Its divine head proudly catches the gold sun, and seems to rejoice in its own sumptuousness, yet — why is it? — my eyes are all the time on its shadow. It might almost seem that the sun and the rose were there only to make that beautiful masterpiece of shadow — the sun the artist, the rose the material, the result — this dream of a rose upon the wall. Do I mean that the shadow of the rose is more beautiful than the rose? I cannot say. I only know that all the time I am watching the shadow and forgetting the rose. Can it be that the shadow of the rose is the rose's soul?

No less than the rose itself is it created by the sun out of particles of matter so fine, the immaterial silver of shadows, as to make the rose's texture coarse and homespun. By the side of this dainty phantom the rose's beauty seems a heavy, material thing.

Would you say that a beautiful face is more real than a picture of it? — yet the picture will remain long after the face has passed away. Then should one not rather say that it was the face that was

the dream, and the picture the reality? When we look back upon our lives, do we not see that it was the shadows that were the realities? What of those long morning shadows full of romantic promise that ran before us in the sunrise of our lives, kissing their hands and inviting us to mysterious goals? What of Love? What of Fame? They were real only so long as they ran before us, shining shapes of promise. They were real only so long as they were shadows.

## II

As I contemplate that shadow-rose on my wall, it comes to me that thus has my life gone by. All my life have I been loving the shadow of the rose, and so it will be with me till I die. I am of those for whom it is destined. My Rose will always belong to another — but her shadow will belong only to me.

Long before I saw the Rose I had known she was in the world, for her beauty was upon the lips of Fame. I had seen a picture of her face, and thought how strange it would be if I should ever come so near to that fairness as to hear her voice. But she lived in a far land, and it seemed unlikely that our paths would ever cross. Then by chance one day I heard that she was coming over the sea.

The Rose was coming over the sea — and for days the western wind seemed sweet with her coming.

A caravan from China comes ;  
For miles it sweetens all the air  
With fragrant silks and dreaming gums,  
Attar and myrrh —  
A caravan from China comes.

O merchant, tell me what you bring,  
With music sweet of camel bells ;  
How long have you been travelling  
With these sweet smells ?  
O merchant, tell me what you bring.

A lovely lady is my freight,  
A lock escaped of her long hair, —  
That is this perfume delicate  
That fills the air —  
A lovely lady is my freight.

Her face is from another land,  
I think she is no mortal maid, —  
Her beauty, like some ghostly hand,  
Makes me afraid ;  
Her face is from another land.

The little moon my cargo is,  
About her neck the Pleiades  
Clasp hands and sing ; lover, 't is this  
Perfumes the breeze —  
The little moon my cargo is.

The Rose was coming over the sea, and my heart wondered: Shall we ever meet? One of those

mysterious voices of the soul, which are deeper than reason, whispered that nothing could prevent our meeting, and with the premonition was blended a vague fear as of some beautiful sad destiny about to fulfil itself. Yes! The Rose and I would surely meet. Yet I said that I would in no way plan to that end. A meeting so devised would seem valueless to me; as little significant as though one in love with a queen whom he had never seen, hearing that she was to be present at a theatre, should buy a box, that he might look upon her during the performance. No, if we were to meet at all, Fate and not I must arrange the meeting.

Next I read in the papers that the Rose had landed. She was in London. The Rose was in London. She and I had come so near across Time and Space as to be in London together. London had become an enchanted forest, and somewhere in its heart was hidden a magic flower. To think that somewhere in that vast maze of streets the Rose was moving to and fro, like any other woman. Any moment she might whirl by me in her carriage, any moment I might turn a corner, and the Rose be there. Soon I began to read that she had been here, or that she had been there, at this party or that theatre. Soon my friends began to tell me how last night they had met the Rose, and after a while I seemed to be always entering a room the

moment after she had gone, and be aware of the sweetness she had left behind. She seemed to be always invisibly near me, like a goddess in her rosy cloud.

Yes! The caravan had come from China, and London's drawing-rooms were filled with its fragrance.

"The Rose was here just now," my friends would say, and "Oh, but you must meet the Rose," they were always saying. "We must arrange a little dinner." I smiled, but preferred to elude even friendly diplomacy to bring about my meeting with the Rose.

If we were ever to meet, surely some diviner machinery than the social stratagem must be already moving to an event like that. Oh, no! It must never be said that it was through Mrs. Williamson that I first met the Rose. No one less than a Heavenly Power must presume to bring the Rose and me together. Sometimes I vaguely pictured our meeting in a great solitude of stars, with the sound of the sea at our feet, and the moon rising and harps hidden in the sky. Or we might meet, I thought, on a mountain-top, some morning as the day was breaking—suddenly stand face to face, only she and I, in the holy dawn.

It has since struck me as rather remarkable how instinctively my friends divined that the Rose and

I were intended to meet. If Nature herself had told them — as perhaps she did — they could not have been more convinced of our affinity.

“Why, it is ridiculous that you have never met!” they would say sometimes. “You were born for each other!” and so on. Friends occasionally make mistakes with their amiable sorcery of this kind, and induce a spurious interest in two strangers, one for the other, which, when they meet, is apt for the time to wear the appearance of a more genuine relation. The unknown thus presented to our thoughts is apt to ensnare our imaginations in advance, and we are so prepared to fall in love beforehand that when the meeting happens at last, there seems nothing else to do.

But it was not so with the Rose and me. Higher Powers than our friends had interested themselves in our meeting. We had been born to meet, born to love each other — or, should I only say that I had been born to love the shadow of the Rose.

### III

AFTER all, it was at Mrs. Williamson's that we met, one of those evenings when that dear woman gathers about her what she calls “artistic people,” to the accompaniment of hired strings in the hall and many sandwiches. Actually it was a strange

place in which to meet the Rose, and how strange she looked there, amid the twitter of little epigrams, lonely as the moon above the frivolity of some silly little town.

I had gone there with no thought of meeting her; gone for quite a different reason, gone, in fact, because, like all of us, I admired Mrs. Williamson's red hair — and went to look at it once more, as one goes out to gaze at a sunset. If I had been aware that Mrs. Williamson and the Rose were acquainted, I don't think I should have gone; but, actually, Mrs. Williamson was one of the few among my friends who had never mentioned the Rose's name.

However, it was Mrs. Williamson's, and no more august stage, that those Higher Powers had chosen for our meeting place; but, as a great event dignifies the lowliest spot, as fields once sleepy pastures are startlingly transfigured with mighty armies, and the name of a meadow is made immortal by war, as some village stable is suddenly visited by angels, to become for ever a shrine for all the world — with a like significance I sometimes say to myself — “Mrs. Williamson's.”

I have since thought it was strange that I should have been in the room quite a long time before I knew she was there, for I would have said that I could not have been so near her and unaware of

her presence — yet so it was, and I talked gaily with a bright little creature I knew, little thinking how near was the striking of the clock. Then I remember that two people were talking near me, and one of them was saying:

“Isn't she beautiful to-night? Really she is more beautiful than ever!”

“Who is it that is so beautiful?” I turned and asked, for I knew the speaker. “Who is it that is so beautiful?” I asked, unconsciously inviting my doom.

“Why, the Rose, yonder,” answered the man, casually. “I never saw her look so beautiful.”

The Rose! If the man's words had been a flash of lightning striking down between us, my face could hardly have shown so white, or my heart stood so still. The Rose! I bent my head. I dared not look upon her yet. I must gather all of myself together, bid farewell to all I had been, be ready for all that was to be. For I knew that when I raised my head I was to look upon the face of Love, which is the face of death as well. Then I raised my head and looked — and the world was changed.

She was standing in the centre of a small group of fluttering admirers, half a dozen witty fellows, chirruping their little good things at her, like grasshoppers at the feet of a sphinx, for to all they said

she seemed to be answering nothing, standing amongst them quite silent, with a lonely smile on her beautiful face — as far away from them she seemed as a star shining in a pool in the middle of a wood — silent, mysterious, alone. She seemed like the queen of some hidden kingdom of the air, fairy-folk of the elements, who had lost her way into this little drawing-room and was looking for a door of escape back to her own people; and her eyes had a wistful, seeking expression — and were just a little frightened, I thought. The men were plainly disconcerted by this unaccustomed creature, and their twitter died down in embarrassment.

Suddenly she turned her great eyes on me. “O take me back to Fairyland!” they seemed to say. “This is not your home any more than it is mine. These little people frighten me. Let us escape together. O take me away.”

Ah! it was not Mrs. Williamson’s, after all. It was Solitude and she and I, and a voice like distant thunder over our heads, giving us to each other. And others in the room beside ourselves heard the thunder; for I well remember that when I next came back to consciousness of Mrs. Williamson’s, there was a curious look upon the faces of the talkers, as though they had been fellow-spectators of a strange happening. And, indeed, had they not seen two whom Life had chosen for each other

*meet*—there before their very eyes? Is there a stranger thing? If we had cried out each other's names, it could not have been plainer that from that moment we were each other's.

As it was, I do not remember our talking at all. Suddenly we were together in the solitude. The little leaves were whispering all around us, and bright little eyes were peering at us out of the boughs, but we heeded them not, there in that heart of the ancient wood which we had discovered in Mrs. Williamson's drawing-room.

There we sat very still and looked at each other, and I thought my heart would break with the happiness of looking at her — she was so beautiful — break with the joy of having found her there, so lovely a thing in the solitude.

*My love, my love, thou art fair! Thou hast dove's eyes.*

If we talked, I know not what we said, though I remember all else of that night, can see and hear it all, as vivid still and near as the shadow of that rose yonder on the wall. How well I remember every detail of her dress that night, I who have never been able to say what any other woman wore. Let me indulge my lover's heart with trying to describe that little frock!

A trailing kirtle of velvet, rich and soft, its voluminous folds hanging in long lines of wondrous

colour. All the treasures of the opal, blending with the beauteous sea-stone, the amethyst, do but give a hint of its rare shimmerings, which now allure the happy eye as would a field of honey-full clover blossoms, a rare and seductive mauve in sunlight, and again which seemeth to be of the warm gray that broods across a bare woodland at Winter's dusk. And gaily on these lustrous folds, toward the small feet that appear on occasion to kiss the hem of it, twine garlands of round trees and flowers and vines and lovers' knots, all needle-wrought in amethyst and gray and gold. A goodly blending of these there are, and likewise are they scattered over the bodice, as though careless to reveal or to conceal the shot silk of amazing soft lustres that hath been fashioned into a small coat, which hath been slashed away in the front and on the sleeves, the more sweetly to display airy gossamer mousseline, silky white, which hath been confined at the small waist by a rich girdle of blue and a brave buckle of brilliants. Add to this a touch of the same pale blue at the slim throat and a band of gold that doth most kindly hold the sleeve high on the arm, so that its round beauty may not hide unnoticed.

Ah! but methinks I can as little describe her gown as I can describe her, or remember the words we said.

No, not one word can I remember from that night, but I know well what my heart was saying.

“Great Queen,” it said, “if in all the world of faces that come and go a man should find at last your face—what should he say? What shall he do? What can such a one say, but, forgetting all other faces: ‘Here am I, O Queen, a firefly that has flitted hither and thither, seeking, seeking, for the maker of the light of which I have but a tiny spark. In vain have I flashed my small lantern upon this one, upon that, searching for the whole of which I form a part, searching for *you!*’ O radiant one, so dazzling, yet so grandly simple—what shall I say but: ‘I have come. I have found thee. Let me merge my light in the light that is thee.’”

And again my heart said very softly:

“Dear, why have you *your* eyes, why do you have *your* hands, and the true clasp of them; why *your* hair, *your* soul? Why should they be so dear, so inexpressibly sweet, so necessary to me? Why should the heart dream and ache for such, that have been in the world since it began, simply because they are *yours?*”

“Can you answer these love’s riddles? I care not, if you but love me—love me—love me . . . and love me, and love me.

“O Queen, I love you. You—YOU!”

So spake my heart to the Rose, as I sat and worshipped her that evening at Mrs. Williamson's, there in the solitude; and once for a moment she laid her hand on mine and I heard her heart speak.

"I love you," said her heart, in a voice strangely solemn and clear. "I love you."

I dreamed that night that God had given me the Rose — but it was the shadow of the Rose He had given me.

#### IV

O DREAM-ROSE upon the wall so mysteriously made of the velvet shadows and the tendrilled sunshine, I watch you all the afternoon, growing newly exquisite each moment with the changing light, watch you, and love you, my Rose of Shadow. Others may think the Rose herself more fair. But not so I. The Rose is but the Rose's body; you are the spirit of the Rose. You are all my dreams of the Rose, and I dream of the Rose every day of my life, and you are filled as with dew with the tears I have shed for her.

Another hand gathered the Rose herself and set her in his garden, but I envy him not; for at the same moment that he gathered her, I gathered the shadow of the Rose, and she became an immortal

flower. And alas! the Rose herself must fade and wither, and some day all her beauty slip from her in a huddle of petals, leaving but the Autumn berry of the Rose—but the Shadow Rose will never fade. For it was made when the light of dreams streamed over the real Rose—it was then I gathered it: the young shadow of the young Rose.

V

SHADOWS! O my shadows, how I love you! How you come about me in the haunted sunset! I call you by your names and you are by my side—dear shadow names that no one knows but I. The sun is setting and the shadows come about me, the beautiful shadows the Sun of Life made for me and gave me—mine for ever. In the dusk they seem to grow thick about me like a harvest field. Yes! They are my harvest of shadows. The day is nearly ended. Do I seem lonely in the dusk? No, I have my shadows. They come around me like children. Indeed, I am not alone. See how rich life has made me! See what beautiful shadows we have made together in the sun, Life and I! All these dream faces are mine. It needs my eyes to see them now. To others they have passed away; from me they can never pass.

See how we smile on each other, the dream faces and I.

These shining shadows are all the love and wonder and delight, all the beauty and truth, all the kindness of my days, since the morning sun came up, and Life and I and the sun began weaving the shadows. These shadows are my treasure. They are the wealth that has come to me day by day. They are like the leaves of a book on each page of which is written a wonderful event. What lovely pages they are, and they are all mine. All these marvellous things I am reading, while the dream-rose sways on the wall, happened to me. These beautiful people I am reading about, these lovely faces, these true hearts, these sweet voices, are all here, all written in the beautiful story-book of my years, my book of shadows, each page of which is a dream that came true, and is therefore true for ever.

Passed away, did you say? Nay, look again at my shadow-rose on the wall. It grows more real as the sun sinks lower. It can pass away only when the sun itself passes, and the night comes, in which the rose and its shadow are alike seen no more. And when that Shadow of Shadows at last falls over me, will it not still seem to me the Shadow of the Rose?

POET, TAKE THY LUTE!



## POET, TAKE THY LUTE!

**A**LL the rest of the village of Twelvetrees was asleep, and only the moon looked on — with natural sympathy, one cannot but believe — at what was taking place in a little house on the hill-side, somewhat lonely in situation; in fact, the last house as the high-road began to breast the hill and seriously settle down to the King's business of reaching the next market-town.

It lacked an hour of midnight, and, for some long time before, the moon had been aware of the noise of altercation inside that lonely house. A stern voice, heated, one might surmise, not only with anger but also with wine, had been mightily pounding at a boyish voice of much sweetness, which was occasionally able to interject a pleading sentence here and there into the thunder-cloud of the darker voice.

Suddenly the door of the cottage flashed open, and a frail, boyish figure was hurled into the garden, and the door shut again. Almost immediately it was again opened, and an object which the poor

ejected one eagerly recognized as his lute was thrown after him.

“Take your toy with you!” said the voice, “and never let me see either of you again.”

The lad seized his lute with loving anxiety, and stood up in the light of the moon to examine it — lest it should have suffered hurt. It had fared better than he could have hoped. Only one of the strings had been cut upon a stone. Involuntarily he tried the others — a proceeding which, being mistaken by his angered father for bravado, provoked a fiercely opened window and a volley of books.

“Take these, too,” shouted the father, “till you read these you were of some use in the world —”

The boy calmly and gently examined the books, and then, turning to his father, he said:

“Father, will you do me one last favour? You have thrown me out the wrong books . . . I shall only be able to carry one upon my journey — and it is not here —”

“Well?” bellowed the father.

“It is a little vellum-bound duodecimo of the poems of Catullus, printed by the Brothers Elzevir of Amsterdam, father dear — and it is more precious to me than any other book in the world — if you will but give me that — you will find it, I

think, on the right-hand corner of the fourth shelf — I will go away this moment, and trouble you no more as long as I live —”

There was something so irresistible in the combined gentleness and self-command of the boy that he was able to win this concession, and, grimly leaving the window, his father examined the shelves a moment, and then, finding the volume, threw it out to his son, who caught it in his waiting hands with the skill of a juggler.

“Is that the nonsense you want?” growled the father.

“It is indeed. Thank you with all my heart!” answered the son, affectionately placing the book in his doublet. “And now good-bye, father; I am very sorry to have been such a disappointment to you. But really I could not help being born a poet — really I could n’t. I would be a cordwainer if only I could; indeed I have been trying my best —”

The father was curiously softened.

“Had n’t you better come in and try again?” he said.

“No, thank you, father! I have tried all I can. I had better go; good-bye.”

“Don’t you want any money?” called the father.

“No, thank you,” said the boy, proudly. “I

have my lute" — and therewith he flung out of the garden, and up the hill on the way to the moon.

So soon as he felt himself at a safe distance, he put down his lute softly on the grass, and throwing his hat into the air, danced an elfish *pas seul*, expressive of wild delight.

"Free, free!" he shouted aloud. "Free! think of it! no more cordwaining any more for ever!"

"But now to business," he said, when he had finished his dance; "where shall we sleep, O Jacobus Rossignol, and where shall we eat, and moreover where is the money to come from to do either?"

As he spoke, he turned out his pockets to the moon. They were quite empty, except for a little medal of our Lady of Consolation, which had been given him by a village girl who had fallen in love with his singing.

Not a sou! However that was no surprise, and no great worry. As for sleep — how often had he slept under the stars, lying on his back listening to their music — and been beaten by his father for his truancy! A bed of fern, with the firmament for a bed-curtain — and the moon for one's bride. Well, in Jacobus Rossignol's opinion; here you had a bedchamber for a king.

But —

Our poor Jacobus suddenly realised that he was

hungry. Indeed his purse was no emptier than his belly, and there was a pain in one which he did n't feel — or care about — in the other.

Yes! he must eat! Otherwise how could he appreciate his starry bedroom as he would wish to? Even a poet must be fed.

He looked up at the moon. He judged by her position that it was not yet midnight.

“Four miles,” he said to himself, “four good miles to the inn of ‘The Flaming Sword!’ — and on the way I will make a song wherewith to buy a supper!”

So, with a brave heart, little Jacobus Rossignol picked up his lute, and stoutly footed the high-road.

In spite of his two emptinesses, his heart beat high. How could it be otherwise with him, on so fragrant a night of spring, and with such a moon! Indeed, his whole nature was so full of music that anything he looked at or thought of turned immediately into a song. Need I say that it was with no thought of his supper that he made this song to the moon, as he walked with his lute pressed close to his heart? However, you must sing about something nearer than the moon if you expect a supper in exchange for your song. But poor Rossignol had never been practical—he could only sing just what he wanted to sing at the moment;

and although he was so very hungry, he wasted all those four miles in making this song to the moon :

Sweet mother moon ! for am I not your child?  
Kind mother moon ! what is your child to do?  
For surely there is in me something wild —  
And they all tell me that it comes from you.

Here am I, lonely as a babe new-born, —  
Nothing to bring the world in hard exchange ;  
A ray too delicate to live till morn,  
A phantom in the daylight, lost and strange.

O put a dream into my lunar head —  
That I may sell its silver as I sing,  
And earn a meal, moon-mother, and a bed,  
And buy my bruised lute another string.

Though "The Flaming Sword" was still open when Rossignol arrived there, it was evidently all but gone to bed. The landlord was just awake in a corner of the tap-room, and close by him there snored in company a sodden-looking ploughman, and a big soldier plainly overcome by wine.

As Rossignol pushed open the door and looked in, the landlord sat up, and eyed his guest with no affectionate regard. At first sight, poor little Rossignol was not prepossessing — not, at all events, to landlords — with his thread of a body and his white wisp of a face ; and then he looked worn, and poor as well, and he had not had the forethought to remove the dirt from his clothes consequent

upon his father's precipitation of him into the garden. Surely his appearance was not that of a profitable visitor. He could make a much better impression now and again, as I will endeavour to explain later; but, at the moment, the landlord, to say the least, did not see him at his best.

"Well," shouted the landlord, in a voice as near thunder as he could make it — "Well, what do you want!"

Rossignol was so tired that he had not his customary nerve about him, so he answered promptly from his heart:

"Supper!"

"Supper . . . You are a likely one to order supper at this time of night, are n't you? Let me see your purse, and then, perhaps, you shall see — your supper . . . What say you, Master Weevil?" and he nudged the snoring ploughman at his side. "Supper! God 'a' mercy! What do you think of that, Corporal?" and he appealed to the sleeping soldier — but the corporal was too fast asleep to hear him.

Seeing that his humour was somewhat wasted, he again turned to Rossignol.

"Let me see your purse, young man," he said, "and then we will see about supper."

"I have no purse," answered Rossignol, seeing that ready words could alone help him. "I threw

it away four miles back. It was too heavy to carry — with nothing in it. Is there anything so heavy, Master Hironnelle, — for though you know nothing of me, I know you for the best arm at bowls in six counties — is there anything so heavy as an empty purse . . . ”

But the innkeeper was too important a character in that countryside to be softened with so worn a compliment.

“That is all very well,” he said. “But supper costs me money — why should I give it to you for nothing . . . ”

“I will sing you a song in exchange . . . ” answered Rossignol, shouldering his lute, as though he would play.

“A song . . . a nice time to sing,” answered the landlord. “Why! You would rouse the house. There is a company upstairs of ladies and gentlemen worth more money to me than I could make out of fellows like you if I kept this inn for a thousand years . . . ”

But it was somehow evident in the landlord’s expression that he had a kind ear for music; and at that moment the big soldier suddenly sat up with a yawn.

“Who said a song!” he roared, “a song! that’s just what I want. Who said a song . . . ”

The Corporal was evidently a man of some im-

portance in those parts, and the landlord turned to him with respect . . .

“This ragamuffin here,” he answered.

The soldier rubbed his eyes, and looked at Rossignol with sleepy fierceness

“What can you sing?” he said presently.

“Anything,” answered Rossignol, on his mettle.

“Can you sing a soldier’s song?”

“Can I?”

“So! . . . well sing us—‘The Three Jolly Corporals.’”

“That I cannot do, for I don’t know it, but if Master Landlord will give me a cup of wine—for I have walked a long way and am tired—I will sing you a soldier’s song of my own making . . .”

“No, no,” interrupted the landlord, brusquely. “I am here to sell wine, not to give it . . . Let us have your song, and we will see about your wine . . .”

“I am sorry,” answered Rossignol. “I would do as you ask, if I had the strength, but, as I said, I am very tired and I am too faint to sing without some food, or at least drink . . .”

“Give him his wine,” said the soldier commandingly to the landlord. “You know me. Give him a full cup—give him two, if he will—and see that it is good . . . I like the boy, there is a brave

light in his face . . . Give him his wine, I tell you . . .”

And the soldier being, as I said, a great man in those parts, the landlord scuttled off immediately, and in a moment or two placed a tankard in front of little Rossignol almost as big as himself.

“Is it good wine?” asked the soldier, who between wine and sleep was inclined to be quarrelsome.

“It is the best Burgundy in my cellar,” answered the host, completely cowed.

“Now, sir,” said the soldier, addressing Rossignol, “allow me to drink to you. You carry a lute, I see; I carry a sword. They have always been old friends. Men like our host here, a good fellow in his way, don’t understand these matters. They merely sell . . . and look narrowly at their returns; but the soldier and the poet give — give for the joy of giving: the soldier gives his life, the poet gives his song — and ask nothing more in return than you asked just now: food and a little wine . . .”

Rossignol was naturally much cheered by this address, and he raised his glass to the Corporal with a smile so winning, so full of naïve gratitude that the Corporal’s heart was his from that moment.

“My name, Corporal,” he said, “is Jacobus Rossignol — if I had a sword, how proud it would

be to be the younger brother of your sword! As it is, I have nothing but a lute. Would it were worthier of being at your service . . .”

Thereon Rossignol took his lute and pulled here and there at its strings.

“It has had an accident to-night,” he explained; “one of its strings is broken . . . but I will do what I can . . .”

“No hurry!” said the soldier. “Let us drink another cup of wine. The night is still young, you will sing all the better . . .”

Presently, as the wine gave him heart, Rossignol took up his lute in good earnest, and sang:

Soldier going to the war —

Will you take my heart with you,  
So that I may share a little  
In the famous things you do?

Soldier going to the war —

If in battle you must fall,  
Will you, among all the faces,  
See my face the last of all?

Soldier coming from the war —

Who shall bind your sunburnt brow  
With the laurel of the hero,  
Soldier, soldier — vow for vow!

Soldier coming from the war —

When the street is one wild sea,  
Flags and streaming eyes and glory —  
Soldier, will you look for me?

The Corporal expressed his appreciation of Rossignol's ballad with such heartiness that the ploughman, who had slept peacefully through the singing, woke up.

"You have missed a good song, Master Weevil," said the Corporal, "but perhaps Master Rossignol will sing it over again for your benefit . . ."

To this Rossignol readily assented, once more to the Corporal's great satisfaction.

"The sword is all very well," said the ploughman, after a pause, "but I am a man of peace, a man of the fields and the plough. I suppose you have no quiet song for a countryman like me . . ."

"Have I not?" said Rossignol. "Listen . . ."

and once more he took up his lute and sang:

Let whoso will sing towns and towers,  
 'T is not so that my heart is made;  
 My world is a wide world of flowers,  
 Leaf upon leaf and blade on blade.

Of buds and butterflies and birds  
 I ponder, lying in the grass,  
 For company the quiet herds,  
 And the slow clouds that pass and pass.

Safe in the leafy arms of trees,  
 I watch, through many a summer noon,  
 The silken shadows of the breeze,  
 Till the stars come and bring the moon.

To silent talk of growing things  
I listen with a loving ear,  
And all that buds or builds or sings  
Is to my heart beloved and near.

O meadows of the earth so green!  
O meadows of the sky so blue!  
How happy have these sad eyes been  
Just looking my great love at you!

So sweet was the sound of Rossignol's voice that it presently came about as the landlord feared. One by one the guests rose from their beds and stole along the corridors, and hung over the staircase, forgetful of each other, if only they might hear more clearly that unexpected music. Like bees on a blossom — so the landlord's guests clung to the balustrade.

Rossignol had but finished the countryman's song, and was in the act of raising his glass to the Corporal, in recognition of his generous praise, when a woman's voice haughtily summoned the landlord into the hall. It was the Princess Belle-fleurs, speaking for all the rest.

"Who is it that sings so sweetly at midnight, Mr. Landlord?" she asked, as M. Hironnelle came out with a cringing, apologetic mien.

"I am sure," answered M. Hironnelle, "I beg your pardon, Princess. I beg pardon of all you lords and ladies, but . . ."

“Fool!” answered the Princess. “Man or nightingale, give him this, and beg him sing another song”; and she flung down a gold piece as big as a rose.

“Let us see him too,” she cried; and thereon the whole company, on a sudden impulse, streamed laughing down the stairs into the tap-room, bidding the landlord bring them wine, and there were Rossignol and the Corporal smiling to each other over their cups.

The landlord of “The Flaming Sword” was so impressed by the reception given to his vagabond guest, that when Rossignol made ready to leave next morning, he begged him think twice before setting out, — for, he added, so long as he was landlord of “The Flaming Sword,” Master Jacobus Rossignol might count on it as his home. In fact, if he would only consent, he was willing to pay him many gold pieces a month in exchange for his song.

But “No — no!” laughed Rossignol, as he stepped out once more upon the road. “Make *me* a slave if you will . . . but my lute shall be always free.”

As Rossignol walked along in the morning air, he tossed his lute up towards the sun.

“Why! I believe you and I together could win

a kingdom," he said, apostrophising it, as he caught it in his arms as tenderly as if it had been a flower; "that is, if either of us were foolish enough to care about a kingdom!"

"Yes, indeed," Rossignol continued, "who would care to be a king, when he could make songs as you and I, and fill beautiful eyes with tears, and draw lords and ladies from their beds, and make strong soldiers our friends — all for a handful of butterflies?"

Indeed, little Master Rossignol, without being foolishly arrogant, was very satisfied with himself and his lute and life in general this May morning; and he was more glad than ever that his father had cast him out to the care of the moon.

"Think of it!" he exclaimed, keeping himself company with conversation, as was his dramatic habit, "think of it! Who in the world is so free as I am? Now, other men walking this road would have business great or small that demanded their arrival here or there. A mitred abbot, travelling luxuriously with his kitchen, must needs take a certain turning of the road. He may not wander away into yonder fairy lane of hawthorn. He is due on a grave mission at the Monastery of the Five Streams and the Fat Meadows. The good monks are already *en fête* in anticipation of his coming. He cannot, merely as a gentleman, dis-

appoint them . . . but you and I, my lute, have no such obligations. No one expects us. It matters to no one but ourselves what road we take . . . and yet our wandering music will always find kind ears wherever we go . . .

“ Besides, my lute, we have forgotten . . . we have money as well ” ; and, plunging his hand into his pocket, he drew forth the rose-noble which the Princess had thrown down for him to the landlord, and of which the landlord had been too flurried to rob him.

“ Did you ever see such pretty money ! ” said poor Rossignol, and he spun it after a lark just then climbing his ladder of dew, catching it again with his usual elfish dexterity. “ Yes ! it is too beautiful almost for money. It is almost big enough to be beaten out into a crown . . . ”

At this moment his soliloquy was interrupted by his becoming aware that he no longer had the road to himself ; for there suddenly faced him, moving slowly between the trees, a small dilapidated cart drawn sullenly by a not too well-conditioned donkey ; and it rattled rustily as it crawled along.

But immediately his eyes forgot the donkey and the cart, as they fell upon the ragged barefooted apparition of a beautiful girl, who, with one hand at the donkey's bit, held in her other hand a long wand of hazel with a few leaves at its top.

Presently the tinker's cavalcade came within speech of Rossignol — for it was just a tinker's cart rattling with pots and pans; and as the girl drew nearer to him, he saw that hers was at once the saddest and the loveliest face he had ever seen. Her rags seemed rather to set off her beauty than to mar it, and, as Rossignol looked upon her face, his heart sank with joy and sorrow; for he knew that he was no longer free.

Taking his hat from his head, he bowed to her.

"You seem weary," he said. "May I not be of some trifling service to you? Let me drive your donkey for you, at least . . . or will you not rest here a little, and eat some cherries with me, and refresh yourself with wine . . ." for Rossignol, in addition to his gold piece, had set out from "The Flaming Sword" with his wallet comfortably packed with such provision.

"Hush!" she said. "Your face is gentle. But I dare not speak to you, for my master is close behind. I left him but now in the village inn, and he will follow me in a moment. He is very strong, and his heart is very hard . . ."

"Are you his slave?" asked Rossignol.

"Yes! I am his niece, whom he has fed and clothed from my cradle. He has been very good to me, but he is often cruel . . ."

"But see . . ." said Rossignol, taking his lute

in his hand, "with this I can do anything — give me leave, and I will soften his heart with a song . . ."

"Hush!" said the girl, "I hear him coming. Leave me, for he will beat me if he should see us talking together . . ."

But, almost before Rossignol could answer, a lumbering giant of a man had overtaken them, and with loud oaths demanded of his niece why she thus loitered to talk with strangers upon the road.

Rossignol had barely time to whisper to her, "I will love you as long as I live. I would die for you . . ." when he found himself caught roughly by the shoulder, and whizzed off so forcibly that it was all he could do to remain standing at the end of his surprise. But, though he had almost lost his feet, he had neither lost his courage nor his tongue.

"You brute!" he shouted at his enemy, "you brute!"

There were blades of grass on the wayside there which were almost as tall as Rossignol, as he stood up so absurdly ready to fight the impossible. But there was such a fierceness in his white shut fist of a face that even the giant was moved to a kind of admiration; yet he was only a common creature, after all; he had, as we said,

but that moment left the inn; his purse was light; and he was in haste to reach the next town.

So, with the least trouble in the world, he took the wriggling might of poor little Jacobus by the collar, and, boxing his ears in some such fashion as an elephant might admonish a fly, he flung him, as he might have flung a nut, down into the underbrush at the edge of the road.

When Rossignol sat up, the road was empty of travellers once more.

“Faith!” he said, ruefully picking up his lute, “we are not so powerful as we flattered ourselves . . . but no! I forgot. It was I that failed, not you! If only I had been given the chance to sing him our song of *The Green Leaves and the Blue Sky*, I am sure he would have listened — and, who knows? he might have given me his niece for my wife . . .”

He looked down the road sadly. It was still rainbowed for him with the remembrance of that beautiful face.

“If only he could have heard me sing!” said little Rossignol.

So, somewhat downcast, Rossignol picked himself up out of the fern, and walked the highroad once more; nor did he nor his lute say a word one to the other for many days. Instead of singing, he paid his way with the gold piece, for he

was so sad that he told himself over and over that he would never sing again.

But one day, about noon, having thrown himself down under a hawthorn, with all its fragrant clouds for a canopy, he remembered the friend he had in his pocket, and, taking out his little Catullus, began to read about Lesbia's sparrow for the thousandth time. The day was heavy with all the honey and the heat of the summer, and, as he read, the book fell from his hand, and he slept there on the grass underneath the hawthorn, the forefinger of his left hand in the book, and his right arm thrown lightly over the back of his lute.

"What, after all, is he but a child?" said the Princess Bellefleurs, as, by chance passing that way in search of silence and wildflowers, she found him lying asleep, with his small white face lying among his red curls like an egg in a nest.

"Just a child! . . ."

"I wonder what his mother was like," said the Princess softly, as she sat down close to him under the hawthorn, proposing to herself to cross-examine him for her amusement, as great ladies may, when he awoke.

It was a full hour before he even stirred in his sleep; and meanwhile the Princess watched him with a very gentle look. At last he opened his

eyes, just as he lay, and, while they were still half asleep, they fell upon the Princess. Dreamily he looked at her without a word. He was too sleepy yet to distinguish between dream and daylight. At length the Princess spoke:

“You remember me?” she said.

“No, I do not,” he answered, with the simplicity of a boy; and he added immediately:

“I remember only one woman. You are very beautiful, but you are not that woman.”

“And who, I wonder, was she?” asked the Princess.

“I hardly know, for I saw her but for a moment. She was the niece of a tinker, and I saw her for a moment on the highroad . . . I do not even know her name, for I had hardly spoken to her before her uncle came upon me, and beat me so that when I came back to myself, her face had gone — as you might pluck a rose from a tree . . .”

“A tinker’s niece!” said the Princess, half to herself; “think of it — you love a tinker’s niece . . .”

“Why not!” exclaimed the poet, suddenly leaping up, wide awake.

“Why not! indeed,” answered the Princess, with diplomacy. And, her eye falling upon the open book, she turned their talk a safer way.

"You are a scholar, too, I see! Will you not read to me out of your book . . ."

"How pretty this Latin looks!" she added. "If only I could read it . . . Tell me what this means, dear poet . . ."

"Alas! I am no scholar," answered Rossignol, his thoughts momentarily diverted. "I am too idle. I am afraid I guess at the meaning of words by their looks, as I guess at the meaning of beautiful faces . . . yet this surely I can spell out for you. I was trying to make a song of it just now as I fell asleep. My words are poor indeed in exchange . . . what words have I for words like these! Ah! to think that a spray of this hawthorn is not so fresh as a line of Catullus after two thousand years! Just listen . . ."

*"Passer mortuus est meae puellae,  
Passer, deliciae meae puellae,  
Quem plus illa oculis suis amabat . . ."*

"The tenderness of it! Isn't it strange that words of so long ago should mean so much to me to-day, sitting here under a comparatively recent hawthorn! What words have I, or any other man . . . but listen again . . ."

*"Nec sese a gremio illius movebat,  
Sed circumsiliens modo huc modo illuc  
Ad solam dominam usque pipilabat . . ."*

"*Pipilabat*," he repeated; "does n't it break your heart — just one word — *pipilabat*. O Princess! you are very wonderful, but you are not so wonderful as a word like that . . . you are not so wonderful as *pipilabat* . . ."

"I am quite sure that I am not," said the Princess, smiling; "and I am the more certain, as I will confess that I am no scholar, and that I have as little idea of the meaning of '*pipilabat*' as yonder crow . . . Tell me what it all means, you wandering boy; and, if you will only sing it to me, I will listen . . . Yes! I will listen, you strange boy, as long as you will sing"; and she laid her hand lightly and tenderly upon his for a moment.

"You are very gracious, Princess," answered Rossignol, "but it is preposterous to attempt to put such words into any other tongue . . . you might as well ask me to translate a wild rose. However, I will do the little that I can"; and Rossignol took up his lute and sang:

Weep, Mother of Love! Weep, Baby-Boy of Arrows!  
And weep all men that have a tear to shed!  
Because — alas! — the sparrow of all sparrows,  
The sparrow of my little girl, is dead.

O it was sweet to hear him twitter-twitter  
In the dear bosom where he made his nest!  
Lesbia, sweetheart, who shall say how bitter  
This grief to us — so small to all the rest?

For Lesbia loved no less that little bird,  
Nor less was loved, than mother loves her daughter,  
Or daughter mother; would you could have heard  
His tiny voice, pretty as falling water!

And in no other bosom would he sing,  
But sometimes sitting here and sometimes there,  
On one bough and another, would he sing, —  
Faithful to Lesbia — as I am to her.

He, little bird, must go, as go the flowers,  
Down the dark road by which no man returns;  
O curses on the black strength that devours  
The beauty of life, and all its music burns!

Foul shades of Orcus, evil you befall!  
'Tis true you smote her little sparrow dead —  
But this you did to Lesbia worse than all:  
You made her eyes with weeping — O so red!

“I would you were not so much in love with the tinker’s niece . . .” said the Princess, as he finished.

“Why do you say that?” asked Rossignol.

“Because,” she answered, rising and making ready to return to her castle close by in the woods — “because I am inclined to think you might have married a king’s daughter . . .”

And thereupon she left him.

“A king’s daughter!” said Rossignol to himself, still only half awake. “What could she mean . . . anyhow, it is no matter: for am I not in love with the tinker’s niece?”

“Think of it, lute,” he said, as he once more started along the road. “Think of it—we are great people, after all . . . we might have married the king’s daughter . . .

“But, ah!” he added, “have we not seen the tinker’s niece!”

“It is a sweet life we lead, you and I,” said Rossignol one day to his lute, “a wonderful life! Do you think we are quite as grateful for it as we ought to be? Think how little we give—and all they give us in exchange! What am I? Now look at me, a mere imp of a man, one half rags and the other half wrinkles;—and come now . . . what are you? . . . a frail shell of rather cheap wood, with almost all your varnish rubbed away, cracked as well in two places, and subsisting on charity for your strings. If any one else were to play upon you but me . . . me, with these fingers” —Rossignol’s fingers were his only personal vanities—“me too with my love . . . Do you think he would be able to wring a tune out of you . . . but, ah!” he added, “forgive me, little brother, my fingers could make music with no other strings. We are neither of us anything without each other. I could play upon no other lute—and no other musician—shall we say, ‘master’?—could play upon you . . . Am I not right?”

“That being agreed upon between us,” Rossignol went on again, “I mean that we two good-for-nothings, of no value apart, are able in our affectionate combination, with no trouble in the world, indeed with the mere self-indulgence of our talents, to do as we please, and heed no one’s bidding, having stored here in our common pouch all the gold pieces we can conveniently carry, and certainly more than you and I could spend in a twelvemonth . . .

“I wonder who found the last overflow,” continued Rossignol, “when our purse was so full that it burst, and we left gold pieces lying like king-cups along the road. I wonder who found them, and what they did with them . . .”

“Do you see those arrowheads down there in the stream?” said Rossignol, presently. “You and I have time enough to gather them if we care . . . but the soldier riding post may not stop, and the mail-coach is too much behind time already to waste any time upon flowers. Even the little stream, leisurely as it is, must go on . . . only you and I, my lute, may sit here and be as lazy as we please, and watch the clouds moving like white cows through the blue pastures of heaven, and listen, if we will, to yonder bird—listen to it, if it sings well enough—and long enough, till the evening star . . . Yes! our life is very wonderful

. . . but O lute, you shall sup as lute never supped before, you shall drink wine as old and fragrant as if it had been drawn from the foundations of the earth, you shall sleep in a bed of down, with silk curtains woven on Flemish looms, and your dreams shall be as sweet as a meadow of daisies: — if only . . . if only you will take me to the tinker's niece!"

Day after day, summer and winter, Rossignol and his lute walked and sang together, and there was no foot of the way that did not seem to them a flower with kindness and wonder.

And it was not only by his singing that Rossignol won his way. There was something good about his young-old little face, something that took you right away with its kindness. You could n't say that it was beautiful—in the usual sense—but there was something about it that made beautiful faces look silly. Besides, he seemed to love and understand everything and everybody. Nothing ever happened but he knew all about it, and knew the only thing there was to do; no one ever got into trouble without his seeing why: seeing, indeed, that there was nothing else for him to do—and seeing in an instant the way out.

He was indeed almost inhumanly clever, but one was compelled to remark that he was never clever merely for himself.

There seemed nothing he could not do. Challenged not infrequently, as he was, to conform to the foolish excitements of the world, he could, in mere child's play, do so marvellously with a borrowed sword — for he had none of his own; being so small a man, his lute was heavy enough — that he made many another soldier his friend; and he could play such tricks with a pack of cards that a whole city devoted to the curing of hides, and dumbly indifferent to his song, begged him to live there for ever.

Once, on his way, he came upon a wandering clockmaker, fast asleep. The clockmaker's cart was drawn under the hedge, and a spirited mongrel, fastened to it, barked an alarm at his sleeping master. But Rossignol silenced him so completely with a touch of his hand that he licked his fingers lavishly in token of friendship; for Rossignol had never yet met with dog, cat, or horse that he could not, with some kindness of his hands or some friendship of his voice, make his devoted slave.

The clockmaker's dog was evidently wild for a run among the possible game of the adjacent fields, for there was a strain of an old hunting grandsire in his lowly blood, and, seeing that the clockmaker was not likely to awake for some time, Rossignol released the poor soul, and applied himself to an old clock with a pretty engraved face, which it

was evident the clockmaker had been trying to mend as he had fallen asleep.

Very soon Rossignol, delighting in all its delicate mechanism, had started the old clock ticking again; and, wondering why anybody should care to keep time, he went upon his way.

He was a friend, too, of all the children along the roads. When some tired mother had given up her querulous infant in despair, he would take it in his arms, and in a few moments put it to sleep with a soothing murmur mysteriously his own, — or with the sprightly imitation of some homely animal, so entertaining that the child's thoughts were diverted from its sorrow.

And so the years went by, and the people along the roads began to understand that the odd little vagabond with his kind eyes and his sweet voice, and that old lute of his, was what is known as a great man. There was hardly any need for him to sing his songs himself, as he passed along, for mothers sang them to their children, and lovers sang them to each other; indeed, the very birds sang them from the trees. Jacobus Rossignol and his lute became at length so famous that universities met him with laurel as he entered the city gates, dusty from the road, and with the same old lute on his arm, and made him Doctor of Laws in spite of his old clothes.

Kings invited him to make his home at their courts, and sometimes he smiled to himself as he thought of that king's daughter.

But fame had no power over his simplicity.

The world had still nothing more to give him than it gave the night his father cast him out-of-doors. And, speaking of his father — well! the lute he had used so despitefully had long since made him so rich and at ease in the world, that the village of Twelvetrees had proved too small for him, and his mere stables resembled a village.

His son knew life too well to feel any triumph over the old man in all this, and, in every way he could, he tried to persuade him that if he had not shot him through the door that night, he would never have been a real poet at all.

“I needed to face the world for myself, dear father,” he said, “and I knew nothing about it till that night. Indeed, I never even knew that the moon was so beautiful till you threw me out into the moonlight . . .”

But, for all his honours, Rossignol and his lute continued their simple way about the world. Rossignol gave his money day by day to the poor, reserving no more for himself than sufficed for food and clothes and lodging, and an occasional new string for his lute; and still, as when a boy, he could not be persuaded that the world

could give him anything better worth having than:

The Spring,  
A Hawthorn in Blossom,  
A Copy of Catullus,  
An Old Lute,

and — The Face of the Tinker's Niece.

But, though he tramped many a dusty road, and read Catullus under many a vernal bush, he looked in vain for that little rusty cavalcade. O, to hear again the clanking of those pots and pans! O again to be pitched headlong into the fern! But it was fated that Rossignol should never see or hear those pots and pans again; and only by accident in one of his wanderings did he at last come upon the tinker's niece, as she was starting on a long journey.

Rossignol was still quite a boy to look at, and indeed the years had perhaps seemed more and longer to him than to other people — for other, wiser, people had so many things to do. He had been doing nothing all this time but walk through the lanes, looking for the tinker's niece. He had seemed to be looking for her for years upon years; though actually she was little more than a woman when he saw her for the last time suddenly one morning, all covered with flowers, in a little churchyard — just as he and his lute were going

by, without a thought of his coming upon her like that.

There were sad voices and solemn music about her, as Rossignol entered the churchyard gate with a strange sinking of the heart. Gently making his way through the dark crowd, Rossignol caught sight once more of her lovely face — but her eyes were fast closed, and her brow was wreathed with lilies . . .

“At last . . .” he cried out, in a voice that made the mourners stand still in astonishment. “At last . . .”

And then, standing as one with authority by the bier, he turned to the priest, taking his lute in his hands, and thus asserting himself, little man, for the first time in his modest life. “Your pardon, Father,” he said, “but I am the poet, Jacobus Rossignol. I love this lady; and either I will sing her awake again, or I and my lute shall be buried in her grave.”

So sudden and strange was his apparition, that his hands were on the strings and his voice among the words before any one had thought of hindering him; and, so soon as he began to sing, no one had a thought except for his song — and his sorrow.

“Poor soul,” said one under his breath, “his grief has broken his heart.”

And this was the song that Rossignol sang to  
the tinker's niece, as she lay with closed eyes  
among the lilies:

This is my lady — pray you wait awhile  
Before you lock such beauty underground,  
Shut in this dungeon that immortal smile,  
And plunder music of its sweetest sound.

This is my lady! Ah! I never told  
All that I dare speak now that she is dead;  
This is my lady! She who lies so cold,  
White as the flowers that wither on her head.

This is my lady! She will never know  
How my heart breaks because my heart is hers;  
I am the nightingale, — she was the rose!  
O give me leave to sing to her, fair sirs!

Ah! rose untimely smitten of the cold,  
I bring my burning lute afire with spring, —  
So young 't would turn to blossom faces old!  
For thee to listen — scarce is need to sing!

Love, sleeping on with such a silent air —  
Awake, for all the land is flower and bird;  
What dost thou, little sluggard, sleeping there,  
Sleeping as sound as though thou hadst not heard!

O raise thy head! — or, if too weary thou,  
Open thine eyes, and nod a little smile,  
And in my arms, ah! love, I'll take thee now  
And carry thee to God each shining mile.

But the tinker's niece lay there as if she had  
heard no word of the song that made the tears

stream from all other eyes in the churchyard except hers.

“It is strange that she should sleep like this,” said Rossignol to himself. “She cannot have heard my voice. I will sing to her my song of *The Coming of Spring*, and then surely, when she remembers the gladness of the green world, she will awake.” And taking up his lute once more, Rossignol sang:

Heart, have you heard the news?

The Spring has come back — have you heard?  
With little green shoot and little pink bud, and the little  
new-hatched bird.

And the Rose — yes! yes! the Rose —

Nightingale, have you heard the news?  
The Rose has come back and the green and the blue,  
And everything is as new as the dew —  
New nightingale, new rose.

Wind of the east, flower-footed breeze,

O take my love to the budding trees,  
To the cypress take it, and take it, too,  
To the tender nurslings of meadows and leas,  
To the basil take it, messenger breeze,  
And I send it, my love, to you.

O April skies!  
The Winter's done,  
O April skies!  
The Spring's begun!  
And honey-humming  
Summer's coming —  
O April skies!

But the tinker's niece lay there in her shroud of flowers, and never stirred, and the priests and the mourners looked on at the strange grief of Rossignol, ignorantly awed.

"It is strange," said Rossignol, and he stood pondering in silence a long time.

Then again he spoke:

"Perhaps it is her will to sleep," he said; "perhaps she is weary and would rest . . . Let us not call her again, my lute; let us rather sing low to her, that she may indeed sleep . . ."

And, taking his lute in his hands for the last time, Rossignol sang softly this lullaby of death:

Vain, all in vain! O Love, thou dost not hear;  
Thou art too lost in sleep to wake again;  
In vain my song, in vain the falling tear,  
Vain, all in vain!

She will not wake again till Gabriel sings;  
For any mortal music we can make,  
My lute and I, with these heart-broken strings,  
She will not wake.

Sleep then, ah! sleep — if slumber be thy will;  
We would not vex thee, though we needs must weep  
Of slumber everlasting take thy fill —  
Sleep then, ah! sleep.

As he finished his song, Rossignol bent his head over his breast, and burst into tears. Then, gaining command of himself, he stood up before

the people, and turning to that grim uncle whom he loved now because he had thrown him among the ferns—

“Will you do this for me?” he said. “Will you bury my lute with her . . . for what to me is the music she cannot hear?”

And as Rossignol left the churchyard in a dream, he laughed sadly to himself:

“O my lute—my lute! We were nothing, after all!”

# THE WANDERING HOME



## THE WANDERING HOME

### I

**T**HE wandering home! The expression, you will say, is paradoxical. Is it not of the essence of home that it is rooted, stable, always snug with welcome and peace in the same green corner of the earth? That is what home means. I know — and, perhaps, fortunately for themselves, that is how most people think of home. Well, it is a question of temperament, like so much else in life.

For the average, or, if you prefer, the normal temperament, the world seems insecure unless it has assured for itself, by irrefragable legal hold-fasts, a lifelong anchorage in the treacherous stream of existence. If it is able to assure the continuance of this anchored safety to those that come after it, and if, too, it should happen itself to have inherited it from those that went before, its sense of security is as the roots of the mountains. The ideal home of such a temperament seems typified by those old country houses one often sees in America, where the family graveyard

is attached to the house, an extension of the garden. The poetry of the ideal is indisputable. It vividly and appealingly concentrates all that we mean by the family sentiment — the conception of men and women not in units, nor even in pairs, nor yet even in single households of parents and children, but rather in clusters of such households radiating from one original root of home — the sentiment of the clan.

There, just beyond the garden, lie the strong builders of the home, the old men of iron, and the beautiful old grandmothers. They have done their work, and they take their rest, while the young folk go on with the work in the old house. But, though they are dead, they still belong to the home, familiar presences that still have their say in living affairs — waking up, as it were, now and again, to say a strong, wise word on occasion, and then to sleep again. Yes, in death they are still at home. They have not been sent away, numbered exiles, to some Siberia of the dead. They lie safe within the circuit of the warm walls they built, and in the dark nights the home lights stream across their graves. And sometimes, as their children read over their names on the crooked tombstones, it makes them feel, as we say, more “at home in the world,” to realize that when they themselves die, they too will go on thus belonging

to the old home, and not wander like orphaned ghosts in the shadowy land.

This is the way of one temperament. Perhaps the majority of people feel like that. It is the way of another temperament, a temperament fundamentally different, that I am now concerned to present.

To this other temperament, that sense of rootedness, of anchorage, in the world which is so assuring and consoling to the first temperament, is one to inspire it with feelings almost precisely the reverse, feelings little short of terror. To this temperament the signing of a lease seems like the signing of a death warrant. It brings one so appallingly face to face with the Last Fact of existence. Even a short lease, after one has turned thirty, is sufficient to inspire this feeling. Say it is only for seven years. Say you are thirty-five. When the lease is out, you will be forty-two. Another seven years' lease will bring you to the threshold of fifty. A third brings you to fifty-six, a fourth to sixty-three, and a fifth to — threescore years and ten! And the odds are that two of those leases you will never sign.

Or you may reflect to yourself something after this manner: To-day, when I sign this lease, I may still call myself a young man — though really young people would n't call me so. At all events,

there is yet a little of the cake of youth remaining. By the time this lease has run out it will be eaten to its last crumb. To-day my little daughter is still a child. By the time this lease has run out she will be a woman. To-day my hair still passes for brown. By the time this lease has run out it will be frankly gray. People will say: "O lots of young people have gray hair!" Yes! but the lease is up, and you know you are not young any more, and will not be young again for ever.

It is thoughts like these that run shiveringly through some of us as we sign a lease, and faithfully promise a landlord, under sundry pains and penalties, to live in the same house, cultivate the same plot of garden, walk the same streets, catch the same trains, for no less than seven out of the few years left us; seven — with an option of renewal to fourteen or twenty-one. You see plainly whose are the features of the grim lawyer, and you see the smile on them, as you set your finger on the little red seal and declare this your act and deed.

Yes, you have promised to live in the same house for seven years. For seven years that might have been packed so full of experiment and experience, you have promised to do the same thing. The gong will sound for meals every day at the same hours. You will walk at the same hour.

You will sit and read at the same hour. The only change will be in the servants, and the only consolation that you are treading the same round with — the same woman.

I would not be misunderstood as writing ungraciously of this sameness in mortal things. Life is, and must be, made up of the same things. But the art of life is to make ourselves forget that they are the same things — the art, and the problem. Nor is it, indeed, that we would change these same things for other things. The burden of sameness is not in the things themselves, but rather in the monotony of their arrangement. The ingredients of the same old dish are excellent, but the cook lacks versatility. All that is needed is the transforming touch of that "perpetual slight novelty," which Keats declared to be characteristic of true poetry. That the spring always brings the same flowers and the same birds is not matter for this complaint, for they never seem the same; or that the face of a friend should always look the same, in spite of the years; or that those who loved us once should go on loving us just the same. These carry within them that perennial freshness which is the essence of novelty. Perhaps one can illustrate the kind of novelty of which some of us are in constant need by a comparatively trivial comparison. Take the arrangement

of the pictures in one's room. They are, we will say, all good pictures, pictures which wear well, and not merely brilliant or sensational memoranda of past moods of choice. They are deep wells of beauty, the bottom of which we have never seen, nor will ever see. Yet there are times when they seem to be failing us. It almost seems as if they have given us all they had to give. We, perhaps, fancy that they are worn out. We need new pictures. The truth, however, is that we have grown weary, not of the pictures themselves, but of their arrangement. If we move them about a little, set them in unaccustomed lights, hang them in other rooms, we shall suddenly find all their freshness back again, and come upon them from time to time with quite a thrilling shock of novelty.

The image is homely and limited, and by no means covers all the ground. It may serve to illustrate the burden of the sameness of things, but it does not touch that terror of securely invested repose and reiteration which is a veritable bugbear of some natures — the wild dread of being “settled down.”

To be “comfortably settled in life” is the very proper aim of most men and women, and so far as the term merely refers to a secure income, even the most incorrigible world-wanderer will not find fault with it. The complaint is not of a settled

income, but of having to spend it in certain settled ways and in certain settled conditions. When we say that a ship is settling down, we mean that she will sail the seas no more, no more feel the adventurous wind in her sails, touch no more strange islands, nor steer her course again by unfamiliar stars. So with a man when he signs the long lease. He is done with experiment. His adventures are over. The sea is wide and shimmering about him. Mysterious ports call him from behind the setting sun. But no! his sailing days are over. He is settling down!

Now the problem for this wild bird that dreads the cage, this nomad that hates the immovable roof, is: How so to order his days that they may present the illusion of that perpetual slight novelty, and not hint too loudly of their swift passing away.

A skilful gardener, as we know, can so cunningly arrange his trees and lawns, and wind about his walks in so illusive a fashion, that even a few acres may be filled with surprises, and you can walk in and out for quite a long time without suspecting how small is the garden. So with life, the problem is to hide the end of the garden, to make-believe it is a never-ending pleasure, and never to hint at the stranger waiting by the iron gate that opens into the haunted wilderness outside.

This, you will perceive, is a very different view

from that of those old American settlers who liked to think of the graveyard at the end of the garden; but it must not be confused with a morbid or cowardly fear of death. The Wanderer I am thinking of does not fear death as death—he only fears its shrinking influence upon life. To him and to natures like his, the *memento mori* does not so much quicken the pace of his living by its warning to make the most of existence. Rather is it apt to make him say: “With so short a time to do anything in, it is hardly worth doing anything at all; with so short a time to be happy in, it is hardly worth while beginning to enjoy.”

There is in all significant human acts an indefinable implication of eternity. We involuntarily do our work with, one might say, an almost instinctive sense of its being somehow or other immortally important. The feeling is not in any sense reasoned. Reasoning may easily dissipate it. But it is none the less there. And we enter into our joys with the same gusto of immortality. One of the reasons for the conquering force of youth is its buoyant possession of this motive sense. Death has not yet entered into its calculations. As life advances, however, death is seen to be something more than the old wives' tale we had thought it. It may well be that we misunderstand death. This sense of immortal impulse in human action of

which I have been writing may very well mean that immortal significance it seems to mean. If so, it is the more important for us to resist the blighting influence on life of our very natural mis-interpretation of death. Maybe death is not an end, but one more radiant beginning. It does not, however, wear that aspect as year by year we approach nearer to it, and, therefore, it is all to the good of efficient living that we meditate as little as possible on our latter end.

Now for the temperament which for the moment I represent, there is no more insistent reminder of that latter end than the rooted, long-leased home. Even amid all the June glories of the distinguished old garden, the warm reassurance of the passionate summer air, the Wanderer shivers as the cold thought takes him of the unchanging stretched-out days, and of that last inevitable day when, with the hushed pomp of mourners, he shall pass out through the Georgian doorway, across the village green, to the dull old churchyard. It is terrible to be quite certain where you will die. The certainty makes you feel something like dead already:

“And enterprises of great pith and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry,  
And lose the name of action.”

## II

THE Wanderer had felt all this very restlessly, and so had the Wanderer's Wife — for what a mistake it is to think that woman is the born Stay-at-Home! The Wanderer and the Wanderer's Wife loved each other with all their hearts — and both their heads. Nature had made them nomads; but nature, too, had made it impossible for them to wander long or far from each other.

They had been married now for nearly twelve years, and yet it was plain truth, and no smug platitude for social publication, that their love was as young and fresh as ever. They had never bored each other for five minutes. The stress of so many years of life had so far failed to reveal any serious lack of harmony between them. Nature had evidently selected them with great care for each other — but they had been wise, too, and skilfully seconded nature with that tact of loving for lack of which too many unions equally well planned by nature fail of success.

“One needs to be clever, as well as devoted, to love successfully,” the Wanderer's Wife was fond of saying. “Love, particularly married love, is the most difficult of the fine arts. Love needs enor-

mous taking care of—needs amusement, distraction, and perpetual refreshment.”

There was, of course, nothing particularly new about this wisdom. It was the success and the novelty of its application that gave significance to the words; and it was, indeed, no small success for two such natures to have been married for so long, and yet to have retained the precious sense of vista, the salt of adventure, in their lives. All the security they felt the need of was in the deep sense and tried knowledge of their love. They did not feel the need of daily monotony to make them sure of the stability of their marriage bond, nor did they conceive marriage as a state in which two people never take their eyes off each other. They were, indeed, mysteriously two in one, yet they remained two as well, two separate beings, with the need occasionally of separate atmospheres to breathe in. They were blissfully married, but, at the same time, blessedly single.

“The first thing to remember in marriage,” the Wanderer’s Wife would say, “is that, talking without cant, each one has needs in life besides the other. These needs may be pleasures that the other cannot share, or they may be simple, innocent habits or personal methods, with which marriage so often disastrously and stupidly interferes—such as the need, say, of a silent hour alone or of

a solitary walk. The truest lovers must occasionally get on each other's nerves — that is why a large house is wisest for love to live in, and why love in a cottage seldom succeeds. Then, while one of the true delights you marry for is that of doing things together, there are times when a certain impatience of this perpetual duality of all our actions is to be feared, and an irresistible restlessness to do something for and all by oneself — just as when one was a girl or boy — comes over us. For once not to have to share, for once not to have our little adventures companioned even by the most sympathetic companion! For once to be allowed to forget that there is such a being even as the best husband in the world!"

This, no doubt, had an heretical sound for some ears, but the experienced ones conceded the wisdom of the Wanderer's Wife, and the well-known success of her principles in practice silenced criticism.

The Wanderer and his Wife attributed much of their happiness to the fact that they seldom lived for long in the same place. Their constancy was largely due to the stimulus of change, and the freshness of their love largely came of the freshness which was thus maintained in their own natures. Through the windows of their house of life fresh currents of air were continually pouring, and when

the aspect from one window wearied they turned to another. In fact, their house of life should rather be described as a tent pitched according to their mood, now in one latitude, now in another — so to say, the portable *pied-à-terre* of two fellow pilgrims, who sought the elixir of youth in company and felt that they had found it with every new experience, or every rejuvenation of an old one.

Two children had been born to the Wanderers. The girl, Pervenche, with her deep forest eyes, the colour of which no man could tell, and her little nut-shaped face, half hidden between the big, brown foliage of her hair, was now ten — she was already a woman in fairy-land — and the boy, Asra, with his northern blue eyes and obstinately curling gold hair, was eight.

As you would expect, heads were sometimes shaken over the effect upon these young lives of the Wandering Home. “No home-life, poor darlings,” had been said of them. Such is the superficial wisdom of the ignorant. Pervenche and Asra knew better. Instead of one home, with one playroom, they had homes and playrooms all over the world, with an ever-changing succession of toys. Instead of only feeling at home in one little corner of one little town, or one little village of an earth glittering with strange cities, and teeming with towns

as stars in the sky, and villages as sand on the seashore, their young imaginations were already at home in a hundred distant places, and their young memories already stored with travel pictures from half the planet. Homeless! Why, if ever two children felt at home in the world, it was Pervenche and Asra, for, wherever they went, the world was like a new picture-book, with the wisest and most loving father and mother to turn over its pages and tell them its meaning. Instead, too, of growing up prejudiced little provincials, they were already qualifying to be citizens of every nation, and, instead of merely having friends who lived in just the same sort of houses as they did, and talked the same language and wore the same clothes, they already numbered dear friends who called them the prettiest pet names in French and Italian — and perhaps the dearest friend they ever had was a tiny little gentleman who used to tell them the beautiful names of things in Japanese. Many little children would have called these people “foreigners,” but Asra and Pervenche would not have understood. “Foreigners”? No, they were friends. So much for the place of the child in the Wandering Home.

## III

THE Wanderer and his Wife were standing on their little roof-garden right away at the top of one of those fortresses which in New York they call apartment houses. In Italy they would be called *campanili*, or some other name more appropriate to their beautiful, soaring strength.

It was the close of a brilliant January day, and the sun was setting as, to some of us it seems, it can only set over New York, in a glory of grim towers and city smoke, a tumbled beauty, formless, unconventional, yet sternly impressive. From where they stood, turning to right and left, they could see the North and the East Rivers gleaming at the ends of their embattled street. Silhouetted rigging now and again stood out for a moment against the gleam, passing slowly out to sea. The infinite freshness of the Atlantic swept up over the vast towers, already peopled with lights. Cressets and sky-signs began to fill the dusk with fiery writing. Up Sixth Avenue the elevated railway moved like a magic lantern-slide, and out of the deepening night far sea-horns called homelessly, homelessly.

“This is New York,” said the Wanderer’s Wife,

as they stood hushed on their tower. "It is so beautiful — I wonder why we should ever want to live anywhere else."

"So do I," said the Wanderer, and after a pause he added: "But we do. Do you hear the wandering horns calling us out there:

"'Where shall we wander?'

Said he and she.

'O anywhere yonder,

Anywhere yonder,

Out to sea.'

"But where shall we wander this time, child?" he continued, "for I feel your wings already beating for flight."

"Yes! to which of our homes shall we wander?" said the wife, laughing. "I know it's preposterous at the time of the year, but I've got a sudden homesickness for the dear old face of Madame Henriot. I wonder how she is."

Madame Henriot was the old lady who looked after their little  *pied-à-terre*  in Paris, and, as the wife spoke, there came before her eyes a picture of that vivid city, putting on her jewels in the frivolous lute-stringed twilight. Like a city of fireflies it flashed into her imagination, and the sound of it came back to her, gay and sad as one of its own  *chansonnettes* , that wonderful murmur of Paris, like the sound of a great shallow river,

blended with the singing of many sirens, that seems to be calling you — to come and drown, to come and drown, to come and drown.

“We can go to Paris and London later,” said the Wanderer, “but now —”

“London!” exclaimed the wife, her mind instantly making another picture. “Yes! I should love to see London too, — dear old London, with its burly roar — like the sound of a great waterfall busily turning mills. I wonder how our little Chatterton garret is looking”; and she was back on the instant in some tiny old-world chambers with low beams and undulating oak floor, tucked under the roof at the top of a crazy winding staircase; a swallow’s nest, with red tiles and a sweeping view of the trees in Lincoln’s Inn Square, swaying to and fro in a prison of historic architecture.

“Yes,” she said musingly, pointing to the fading glow in the west, “but you must confess that the sun sets very prettily behind the Law Library in Lincoln’s Inn.”

Then the growing chill of the night drove them in to the lighted sitting-room behind them.

Pervenche and Asra were in the sitting-room, turning over picture-books, on the edge of bedtime.

“Where would you like us to go this year, Pervenche?” asked the mother,

Pervenche looked up out of her deep cave of hair, and after a moment's serious thought answered :

“ I think, mother, I should like best to go to the Orange Trees in the Blue Mountains. It is quite a long time since we were there.”

“ But how about your French, dear? ”

“ O mother, I know far more than I did then.”

“ Suppose old Nonotte should ask you to say one of those little songs she used to teach you — ”

“ I remember them, mother — at least some of them. I can say *Les Hirondelles*, I'm sure.”

“ Say it, little one,” said the father, stroking her long hair.

After a quaint little clearing of her throat by way of preparation, Pervenche began :

“ Que j'aime à voir les hirondelles,  
 À ma fenêtre, tous les ans,  
 Venir m'apporter des nouvelles  
 De l'approche du doux printemps !  
 Le même nid, me disent-elles,  
 Va revoir les mêmes amour :  
 Ce n'est qu'à des amants fidèles  
 À vous annoncer les beaux jours.

“ Lorsque les premières gelées  
 Font tomber les feuilles des bois,  
 Les hirondelles rassemblées  
 S'appellent toutes sur les toits :

Partons, partons, se disent-elles,  
Fuyons la neige et les autans ;  
Point d'hiver pour les cœurs fidèles ;  
Ils sont toujours dans le printemps.' ”

“Bravo, dear!” said the father, as Pervenche finished, with a little gasp of achievement. “So you would really like to go to the Orange Trees in the Blue Mountains. Well, mother and I will think about it. But what is Asra’s opinion?”

“I,” answered Asra, stoutly, “would rather go to North Star Castle, and play among the rocks and go out with the old fishermen.”

North Star Castle was their name for an old inn right away near the top of Norway, mortised in among rocks and fishing-nets, and filled with the sound of the sea.

“But it would be so cold there yet, Asra. Why, we should have to walk in snowshoes, and wear skins, like the Eskimo . . .”

“I should love snowshoes,” rejoined Asra.

“And perhaps eat candles . . .” the father continued smiling.

“O father!” both the children laughed skeptically.

“Or frozen whale.”

“O father!”

When the children had gone, the Wanderer turned to his wife.

“What do you think of Pervenche’s suggestion?” he said.

“I second it,” she answered.

So it was decided that they were to take the next Italian boat, and come at length to the Orange Trees in the Blue Mountains.

The Orange Trees in the Blue Mountains was their name for an old mill-house lying in a fertile valley, at the back of the dark hills which run like a wall along the French Riviera. It is hidden away four or five miles inland behind an old rocky castellated town that overlooks the Mediterranean, a scramble of narrow, climbing streets, little shops, market-place and old parish church, all huddled under the grim shadow of the old feudal castle. The valley is so spacious as rather to be a plain, — a vivid oasis of cultivation refreshing to the eye and heart amid the swart solitudes of the surrounding hills. A little river ripples like a harpsichord through the valley, past whispering trees and round grassy corners flickering with anemones. There, too, is a vineyard, acres of tendrilled green, and a great cluster of barnlike buildings, in which the wine is stored in mysterious vats and barrels. An avenue of limes runs like a silver lane across one end of the valley, and, if you walk up this lane, you come at last to The Orange Trees in the Blue Mountains — a rambling old mill-house tucked into

a ferny elbow of the hillside, just where the river sings its way back among the hills, turning the mossed old waterwheel as it goes. Along the river bank runs the big old garden, rambling up the hillside, and here in the sun grow the orange trees — solar systems of golden fruit in a heaven of bright and bushy emerald. Above the garden is a little olive orchard, mounting in terraces of sunny shadow; regular irregularity of twisted trunk, and cloud upon cloud of sunburnt green. Each step of the broad staircase is a long floor of laughing flowers; a terrace of olive trees, then a little jump of hyacinths; a terrace of olive trees, then a ledge of yellow roses; a terrace of olive trees, then a strip of beans in flower; a terrace of olive trees, then a lake of freshest violets; so, by steps of orchard and flower bed, with shadowy resting-places of sudden rock, the olive trees give place at last to the little cork-oaks, that clothe the hills with a thickset garment of small, dark, shining leaves — the gate of the wilderness.

The Wanderers had come upon the place in one of their earliest wanderings together, and the old miller and his wife had taken them in to lodge there, one never-to-be-forgotten spring, before as yet either Pervenche or Asra had their present wide acquaintance with the world — in fact, before they had come into the world at all.

The place was indeed to them that hidden garden somewhere in the world for all of us, a garden of which most of us have lost the key, or which we dare not visit again: the garden of rapture, of enchanted moments — the Eternal Eden. There was not a corner of that little valley, not a bend of the stream, not a dingle in the woods, not a path across the hills, which had not for them a fairy significance; nor yet a face they had seen, nor a local characteristic, nor any smallest occurrence of the time, which was not then and now of the stuff of dreams.

O those old picnics by the stream side! One of Mother Michaud's delicious patés made especially for them, and exquisite white cheese, and a litre of the valley's own wine, bought from Bacchus himself, as they called the huge old keeper of the vineyard — true wine of the earth, for forty centimes the litre. And some exquisite book, not so much to read in, but just because they knew it to be full of beautiful words. Then to lie back into the golden grass with their cigarettes, and look up at the sky through the dainty trees. And, all the time, the running of the river and the visiting butterflies and — themselves.

And those long tramps among the hills, hills which at first promised nothing but the sombreness of the cork-oaks, and the metallic rocky footways,

but which were presently seen to be silvered with asphodel, and embroidered with orchids — ivory, and velvet, and dew, and green with unsuspected nooks of grassy freshness. How they would start at dawn, while there was still a feeling of starlight in the air, and the sun had not yet warmed to his work! Up and afoot before nature's business was a-hum, and while its beauty was but half awake, wandering on while the day slowly kindled like a newly lit fire about them, on to the merry blaze and roar of noon. And all the time that thrilling comradeship of two who are at once comrades and lovers. All the little excitements of the way — the high spirits, the wit, the romp of it all; and at length as noon would bring them with a sudden flash of amethyst to the Mediterranean and the old brasseried town — O! what an inspired appetite for lunch, an appetite so keen and fresh as almost to seem a spiritual rather than a physical hunger! Then the old garden of *Les Hesperides*; again orange trees, and arbours of yellow roses, and fair food and wine like laughter in the glass, and — each other.

All these and a hundred such pictures passed through the minds of the Wanderers as they sat musing a moment after the children had gone. They both came out of their dream-garden at the same moment, and their thoughts met at the gate.

“No wonder Pervenche loves the Orange Trees in the Blue Mountains,” said the Wanderer, gently.

“Do *you* want to go there again?” asked his wife, smiling.

## THE FIRST CHURCH OF THE RESTORATION, AMERICAN

*[I am compelled to disguise the names of the people taking part in the following story, as their real names are too well known in New York society. Essentially, however, the story is true, as time will prove.]*



## THE FIRST CHURCH OF THE RESTORATION, AMERICAN

**A**S the Reverend Arthur Winslow stepped out on to Fifth Avenue at four of a May morning—to be precise, the morning of May 14, 1901—any one who had observed him would readily have understood why he, of all men, or rather all clergymen, should have been chosen for the remarkable revelation which had been made to him during the most momentous night of his life, a revelation with which his whole being was turbulently on fire. He dismissed the automobile which had been awaiting him since one o'clock—the automobile with which, as a fashionable divine, he did his district visiting—and turned toward the park. He needed to walk. As he strode away, with the vigour of an athlete and “the grace of a young god,” he paused once to look at the house he had left—a famous house, the owner of which was known for his combination of enormous wealth with exquisite taste. Probably no one ever passes the house without saying to

himself or his companion, "That is Mulciber Jackson's house." But if that passer-by knew how much more that house means than he has the dimmest notion of, with what a different wonder would he gaze at it! The minister knew — that is, he had known for an hour or two. He had often dined in that house before. He was quite accustomed to dining with millionaires. Was he not known as "The Millionaires' Vicar"? Yet he had never had the smallest suspicion of what he now knew. Not a hint. The secret had indeed been well kept.

The air was all sensitive with the dawn. A mysterious purity was in the air. Fifth Avenue looked like some fairy street just made in a dream. The indescribable eloquence of the silent coming of light thrilled the heart. From masses of sleepy mother-of-pearl, the sky changed to handfuls of fire-red opals, and spears of pure gold shot up here and there through the tumbled colours of the clouds.

Winslow had an impulse to go on his knees, right there in Fifth Avenue, before the august Light-Bringer, but he forbore; though the impulse showed the insight which had prompted the remarkable proposal which was filling his heart with the blended exhilaration of joy and fear. Within the seclusion of the park the impulse grew

even stronger. The vivid grass, almost phantasmal in the freshness of its green, the spiritual look of the trees — “the trees about a temple” — the consecration which seemed mysteriously poured over the most ordinary object, affected him almost to the point of ecstasy. He looked at his Christian clothes with a strange smile. Had he been in a more secluded place, he would have torn them from him, and stood up naked in the dawn, a radiant young priest of Apollo.

Mulciber P. Jackson was one of those powerful ugly men whom women adore; of massive build, a rough-hewn face, bearded as a rock is bearded with ferns and mosses, he was, at the same time, ponderously lame. He had a humour which was like the laughing of a volcano, and he could also, at times, suddenly reveal a charm of gentleness, tender as those surprising nooks of green that nestle in the fire-mountain's side.

His wife was the most beautiful woman in New York. As such, I presume she is not easily identifiable. Were I to tell you her real name, you would recognize her at once as the most beautiful woman in the world. The Mulciber Jacksons were somewhat mysterious in their origin. Of course, it was said that Mulciber Jackson was a Jew, or “a Hebrew,” as they politely say in America. It is one of the many privileges of all rich men to be

credited with belonging to one of the two most remarkable races that have made human history and still go on making it. Acute observers referred Mulciber Jackson to that other race, and there they were undoubtedly right; for he was certainly more Greek than Jew. His wife's face was pure Greek, as a woman's face is allowed to be. Some spiteful tongues said that Mrs. Mulciber Jackson imitated the Venus of Milo; but her beauty was too adventurous, too rich and strange, to merit the accusation. Even if Mulciber Jackson had not been ugly, he would still have attracted to his house all the beauty of New York; for, as I have said, he was rich as well. Indeed, to dine at his table was the quickest way to become acquainted with the classics of American beauty and wealth.

Yes, he was a remarkable man, but only those who shared his confidence, as Winslow now shared it, really knew how remarkable. Beneath his somewhat terrible drollery he hid a purpose that could only flag with achievement. Generally known as the funniest man in New York, he was actually its divinest and, some would say, its most dangerous dreamer. What was he rich for? His dream. Why was his life so splendidly hospitable? His dream. Why did he trouble himself about the Reverend Arthur Winslow? His dream. What was his dream? You shall hear.

Dinner at Mulciber Jackson's was apt to be almost too showily symbolic of the power and beauty of America. If one could make any criticism against the taste of his entertainments, it was that his guests were too uniformly remarkable. There was never anyone to be met at his dining-table that was not in some way or another illustrious, except, possibly, yourself. You almost felt that you had been asked to a dinner of public monuments.

Winslow had certainly felt that, till he had grown used to Mulciber Jackson's dinners; and, the first occasion on which he had sat at the great man's table, he had noted with a certain terror the way the guests—for the most part magnates from Wall Street, purposely chosen by a host who realised the clerical interest in rich people—had talked about various gigantic undertakings, as Titans might spin tops together. To hear them talk of fifty millions of dollars—as if the subject was n't money at all, only “horse-power” or so many “volts,” put Winslow's customary eloquence to silence. To his fancy they were like so many presidents of the elements. Here was a man talking of owning the sea, as though he were Neptune; another of electric power, as though he had bought up the bolts of Jupiter; a third discussing rapid transit as though

he were Mercury; and there was a woman who talked of corn as though she were Ceres. There, too, sat a new god discussing oil in a loud voice.

How curiously near the fact Winslow's fancy was he had little known. But the occurrences of this last evening recalled and confirmed it.

During dinner he had been vaguely conscious that something unusual was in the air. His beautiful companion had been indiscreet enough to half ask him questions which, she remembered too late, she had no right to put.

"Was he . . . ?" but "No! she forgot . . ."

And he remembered afterwards that the faces of the men wore a curiously uplifted, one might almost say, religious expression.

When the ladies had withdrawn, Mulciber Jackson took the opportunity of a private word with Winslow. He had not, of course, failed to notice the effect on his face of a sudden strain of music, stealthily escaped and quickly recaptured, as might be said, from the limits of the world: an apparition of sound strangely coming and going along subterranean corridors of approach.

"Arthur," he said — for he was on terms of affectionate friendship with the minister — "I have a surprise for you to-night. You will, I know, understand and appreciate; and I know

it will startle you at first, but, after the first surprise, well, I have hopes I will talk of later."

Presently the guests rose and departed to a quarter of the house which was quite new to Winslow. A quiet-looking door opened on a deep passage slanting gently downwards. The walls of the passage were decorated by frescoes of a decidedly religious character, but the religion was one that has long since passed away. Mulciber took Winslow's arm, and detained him a little way behind the rest. "I suppose you never really suspected your friend Mulciber of religion," he said. "You will see; I shall be surprised if you are not profoundly stirred — and even changed; or rather decided."

Mulciber was unwontedly nervous for so rugged and hairy a man, and his limp made his face twitch painfully.

The corridor at length brought them to an exquisite little elevator of painted cedar, in which they were rapidly carried as it seemed into the very centre of the earth. As they glided downwards, strains of the same music Winslow had heard before came up to them; and presently, as the elevator finished its journey, Winslow found himself in a hushed world of worship and white marble. As from a small private chapel he was looking out into a beautiful little Greek temple.

The temple was already filled with kneeling worshippers, and white-robed priests moved about the altar in the offices of a ritual, which was unfamiliar to the young Anglican priest, but which yet seemed not quite strange to him.

Music and singing of an indescribable mournfulness blent with incense and the piercing fragrance of spring flowers.

Yet, beneath all the terrible sadness, there seemed an undertone as of some lost joy rising from the dead.

It was the Easter Day of some great old sorrow.

It was impossible for Winslow, with all his susceptibility to beautiful ritual, the æsthetic and the emotional side of religion, not to be profoundly moved.

Presently a great hush fell over the temple, as the high-priest took and held up before the people a strange red flower with curiously lettered petals. Then in a moment a great sob seemed to break from the very hearts of the adoring worshippers.

“Ai! Ai!” they cried. “Ai! Ai!” And again “Ai! Ai!” as the priest elevated the sacred flower for the third time.

Then Winslow realised that he was in a temple of Apollo, and that this was a solemn fast of mourning for the death of Hyacinthus, the beloved friend of the god.

He looked at his friends. One and all they were bent in an attitude of the profoundest worship.

Then he, too, bent his head.

Later on, when Winslow was alone with Mulciber Jackson in his little private smoking-room, his host turned to him with some eagerness.

“ Well, what do you think of it all? ”

“ I hardly know,” Winslow replied. “ I am yet too confused, almost intoxicated, with my impressions. Besides, it was all so unexpected, so strange. Tell me what it means.”

“ I suppose you think that it was all a mere masquerade; the latest device of a jaded luxurious society, seeking after novelty? ”

“ At first I did,” the minister answered; “ but there was a note of seriousness in it that soon led me to think otherwise.”

“ I am glad of that, for it was quite serious, and represents a very serious movement which will presently astonish society as it has not been astonished for two thousand years. If I tell you what it means, will you give me your word, without any professional reservation, that you will keep what I shall tell you absolutely secret? ”

“ I give you my word.”

“ You have read Heine’s ‘ Gods in Exile ’? ”

“ I have.”

“ Well — the gods are to be in exile but a very little longer. The old gods are coming back. Two of the most important of them came over on the *Teutonic* last week, and are living here in New York at this moment — of course, under assumed names, awaiting the event of which I will presently tell you.”

“ But you cannot be serious. ‘ Gods in Exile ’ was merely a fancy . . . a witty imagination.”

“ I am perfectly serious, and Heine’s fancy was only a fancy in that he represented the gods in a much worse plight than they have ever been in. That was his incorrigible irreverence, to which not even his own profoundest beliefs were sacred. Actually none knew better than Heine the true status of the eternal gods in a world and amid a civilisation from which they had been formally banished, but which they actually control.”

“ But, Mulciber, you speak of the gods as if they were actually alive — as if, indeed, they had ever really existed at all, and were not mere myths of the popular imagination. Even supposing them once to have lived, they died at the birth of Christ.”

“ Pardon me. So far as I have heard or read, the death of but one god has been ever reported, the death of Pan — and Pan’s death was a legend of which Christianity was sorely in need at the

time, for the simple purpose of combating the all too vigorous existence of the very god the legend declared to be dead. 'Great Pan is dead!' Why, even you, as a Christian minister, face to face with the warm instincts of humanity, must know that, of all the gods, Pan is the god likely to survive all the rest."

"Well, continue," said Winslow, after a pause. "I confess that I am somewhat bewildered. Let me listen, and I will try not to interrupt."

"Then you must first try to realise that all I tell you is not fancy — strange as it may sound — but actual truth. The old gods, as we call them, have never died. They have only been deposed for a short time. They are soon to come back to their thrones. Actually they have never left them; it is only officially that they have been exiles."

"Go on," Winslow nodded.

"Let us talk a little theology," continued Mulciber, smiling; "I am sure you won't object. I have often seen the race to which I am popularly supposed to belong, praised for a theological concept which is, it seems to me, its one mistake; a concept contrary to all human experience, and perhaps on that very account — so whimsical is humanity — a concept which has enjoyed remarkable success. The Jews have invented most things, but their most illustrious invention is the inven-

tion of the One God. The Jews are the most abstract, the least human, people in the world. They are a nation of idealists, of dreamers, of philosophers, of artists. They are skilled in essences, in sublimations of the fact — rather than the fact itself. And if you consider the real significance of the industry with which they are most popularly associated, you will see how that alone, and best of all, proves my contention. The industry of the Jew is money-making. Money-making is the essence of all industries. Thus the Jew, unwillingly enough compelled to touch earth at some point, touches it where all its various concrete activities concentrate into an abstract synthesis, or distillation, — hopelessly, I know, to mix one's metaphors. Money is the distillation of all human labour. It is a volatile, immaterial thing; the abstract flowering result of all the varied processes of human life. The Jew, the aristocrat of all aristocrats, hating to soil his delicate fingers with the rough and common work of the world, but realising that some work he must do, if he is to continue living upon a pleasant planet, naturally chooses to touch life at its most abstract or immaterial summit. Not for him the coarse and narrowing activities of popular industries. Like some poet who will not soil his hands with the writing of a realistic novel, the depicting

of the stockyards of human life, but will sing only of the moon, and the stars, and the face of woman, so the Jew will consent only to take hold of that material which has already passed through so many processes of refinement that no hint of those cleansing processes remains upon it; as one might distil attar of roses for a living, and disown any connection with the revolting processes by which the common gardener rears the rose to its haughty immaculacy."

"Is it proper for a Greek to be quite so fond of using Latin?" Winslow asked, laughing, interrupting merely that Mulciber Jackson might gain a moment in which to breathe.

Taking a draught of Apollinaris, Mulciber continued:

"I have, as I said, only referred to the most notorious preoccupation of the Jew as an illustration of his abstract habit of mind. A race so mentally constituted would naturally produce a Moses and a Spinoza — as it would naturally produce a Shylock. Above all other races, it is the Mental Race. In spite of their remarkable persistence, the Jews are the least rooted in earth of any people. Their patriotism — is a patriotism of the mind. They will never go back to Palestine. Their idealism is too great. It soars above such mere earthly sentimentalism. They were just the

people, therefore, to conceive an abstract One God — a god remote from humanity, understanding nothing of its needs, its joys, or its sorrows, a god that indeed felt constrained on that very account to send his own more human son upon the earth, the better to comprehend the strange race of men. Through the humanity of this divine son, the concept of the One God, paradoxically enough, has gained its widest acceptance — though the monotheistic ideal which Christ taught has all along needed the aid of his divine mother and the saints to make it acceptable to a humanity that instinctively felt the need of many gods — a god for every need. Gods succeed in proportion to their humanity. Jehovah has never been acceptable to the world, and he owes his present position to the endearing humanity of his son. On the other hand, that humanity has been disastrously thinned by the Jewish blood in his veins. Christ, with all his humanity, was still the son of a Jewish god. He brought the world a gift of which it stood sorely in need, a gift by virtue of which he must hold his eternal place in any Pantheon — the gift of Pity; but with it, owing, as I said, to his Jewish ancestry, he brought abstract restrictions upon the kindly instincts and operations of humanity, which have prevailed over the true gift he gave. It was not really necessary that all the gods

should go for Christ to come. Their banishment was but that inevitable eclipse of other stars which must always accompany the lighting of a new star. Now that the new star has settled down to a normal place in the heavens, we see that the old stars are still burning. That's what I mean when I say that the old gods are coming back — or rather that they have never gone away. Christ will not be banished when they come back. His place will still be His. They merely resume their own."

Winslow was evidently struck by this reasoning.

Mulciber Jackson continued: "Yes, humanity is too complex to be satisfied with one god. It is impossible for one god to understand all the needs, all the hopes and aspirations, of humanity. That there is one god greater than all the rest our own Grecian theology has formulated. Zeus is worshipped as the Father of the Gods. But his wisdom is so great that he leaves the lesser gods undisputed sway in their own dominions. He would not dream of instructing Neptune in the management of the sea, or of interfering with the purposes of Apollo. But we must not wander too far afield. I shall hope to have many opportunities of discussing with you such mere points of doctrine. To-night it is not theories I wish to talk with you, but facts. Now you and I may think as we please about the old gods, their management of the world and so

on, but the fact remains, as I have said, that they are coming back — coming back not only to their own power, but to a power far greater than any they have ever wielded before. If you doubt this, consider a moment the condition of the world, and can you sincerely say that it is a Christian condition? Ostensibly we still live in the Christian era. Our churches are externally Christian. Christian ethics are supposed to rule our lives. Officially the world is Christian — actually it is what you might call ‘Pagan.’ In what is the world most interested to-day? Is it the Kingdom of Heaven, the inheritance of the weak, the amelioration of the poor, the spiritual life? No, the world is interested in Power and Beauty. War and Women and Wealth are practically all it thinks of. It still professes Christ, but its real divinities are Mars and Venus and Plutus. Of this there can be no doubt at all.

“These three divinities were never seriously disturbed by the Christian heresy. Like some royal family, overthrown awhile by popular sedition, they went into retirement, indeed, but into retirement no less splendid and luxurious than the public life to which they had been accustomed. They have never changed the manner of their lives in the smallest particular, nor has the number of their worshippers ever appreciably decreased. The only difference has been that the worship

offered to them has been a secret rather than a public devotion, and for that very reason the more sincere. Actual godship has always been theirs, but naturally, with the pride of their race, they have dreamed of the time when it should once more be publicly acknowledged. It is not meet that the immortal gods should rule the world in hiding, however superb be their hiding-places.

“Now it has been decided that the time for a public restoration of the old gods has come. Not only do all the signs in the world at large point that way, but those familiar with the inner workings of the so-called religious world know that it too is prepared for and sympathetic towards the change. The many new churches which have sprung up of late years, particularly many of them in America, as you know, with immense wealth and social power behind them, have not only been useful in preparing the way for us, by familiarising men’s minds with the idea of a coming change and the necessity of it, but the majority of them are secretly affiliated to our cause, and ready, at the right moment, to throw off the mask and openly acknowledge allegiance to the old gods, whom they actually worship under Christian names. How nearly related to us the oldest and most powerful Christian church has always been you need not be told. The change there will be very slight. The

saints will but resume their old names, and hardly any appreciable changes in the ceremonial will be found necessary. In regard to the newer churches, you may have noticed the prominence given to love in their doctrines. Mystical phraseology is often used to veil it, and it is sometimes referred to as sisterly love or brotherly love; but that it is one of the many forms of the worship of our august lady, known variously as Urania and Aphrodite, no one acquainted with its ceremonies can doubt. Enough then to convince you that the world is ready and waiting for the revelation which I have made to you to-night. I am but one humble mouthpiece of a vast organisation which is backed by all the power and wealth and other influence of the world. You may take my word that on a certain date, which I will confide to you, the world will officially cease to be Christian. Christianity will not be abolished. Actually it has never been more than a small sect. It is too spiritual, too unearthly, an ideal ever to take hold of great numbers of men. By an accident it became constituted as a powerful hypocrisy. Now it will sink back to sincerer dimensions. The number of real Christians in the world will be no smaller than before, and they will be free to worship as they choose, without oppression, or the intrusion upon them of those hypocrites who have

vulgarised their beautiful creed. Orders are already given throughout the world that on that day of Restoration the images of Christ are everywhere to be respected. His place among the gods is his for ever—the place of the God of Pity. It is only, as I said, the old gods who resume their places—the Gods of Power. On that day, in every great city of the world, temples of Jupiter and Apollo, of Diana and Venus, will be opened. They are now in course of erection—supposedly as Christian churches. When you give me your decision, I will reveal to you the full extent of our plans; but first you must give me your answer to this question: ‘Will you consent to be the High Priest of Apollo of the First Church of the Restoration in New York?’”

After Mulciber Jackson had finished speaking, the friends sat some moments in silence. The minister was visibly moved. A great conflict was taking place in his soul.

“You have been chosen for me to speak to, Arthur,” added Mulciber, presently, “not merely because of your popularity and your gifts of eloquence, but because we believe that, while you have been a sincere priest of Christianity in its more human aspects, you have also come to see its limitations as a complete formula of human life. It supplements us, but it can never permanently

displace us. Man needs all his gods: he cannot afford to lose any of them. And, similarly, some men are born to be priests of one god, and some priests of another. Believe me, you were born less a priest of Christ than a priest of Apollo."

Such was the proposal that was agitating the mind of the Reverend Arthur Winslow, as he paced Central Park on the morning of the 14th of May, this present year.

Of his decision I know nothing.

BEAUTY'S PORTMANTEAU



## BEAUTY'S PORTMANTEAU

**T**HE five o'clock train leaving Waterloo on Saturdays for the more distinguished parts of Surrey is undeniably one of the smartest trains of the week. I have heard it jealously called "the Haw-Haw train." I prefer to call it the feudal train — for, apart from its aristocratic travellers, it is filled, from engine to guard's van, with so feudal a spirit that one might, without exaggeration, describe it as a baronial hall on wheels. It is the romance of the day for the corduroyed porters who know their distinguished clients too well to expect from them the costly tips they would surely demand from your mere bourgeois passenger. To sweat and groan under the baggage of a mere merchant, however wealthy, is one thing. There is no glory in that. Therefore, it is natural that you expect money to make up the deficiency. Sir Ralph Gilderoy is, of course, quite another matter. He is a form of poetry. He is emblazoned in your imagination, like a herald's coat. Though he should look like an ordinary passenger — and, to do him justice, he usually does — to your feudal eye he is

romantic as his own coat of arms. Probably your brother is one of his under-gardeners down there in fragrant Surrey, and if he should only give you sixpence instead of a shilling you understand that it is no meanness on his part . . . for you know, by long-inherited instincts of cheerful servitude how hard it is for a gentleman to live in a world so sordidly run upon a money basis. Indeed, if you could only dare, you would like to say to him, "Keep it, Sir Ralph . . . some other time, when you are better off." And should he give you a shilling — you bless him for a gentleman indeed — for no one but a gentleman would give you his last shilling.

If this sounds ironical, sarcastic, or anything cheap like that, I must beg the reader to believe that my words have been put together with no such intention. I mean them to convey neither more nor less than the distinction attaching to the five o'clock train leaving Waterloo on Saturdays for the more distinguished parts of Surrey, and the pure joy it gives to all the railway officials, from highest to lowest, privileged to have a hand, however humble, in running it. Heavens! but it is a proud train! Of course it never dreams of stopping at Surbiton. Stopping at Surbiton! I should think not! Why, it flashes nervously through the station, as though afraid that Surbiton should insist on a

recognition — and it so full of lords and ladies and golf-sticks! Even Esher — think now, Esher! — it thunders through with the utmost nonchalance. Much against its will, it pulls up at Guildford, but anyone can tell by the impatient way in which it fumes out steam that its aristocratic heart rebels at the materialistic time-table which enforces so vulgar a delay.

“Next stop Witley!” cry out the guards and ticket collectors — and with what alacrity the five train hides its shame in the chalk tunnel of the Hog's Back, and straightens itself like a greyhound for the climb to that noble junction of coronetted country roads!

Anyone who flatters himself that the feudal system is dead and done with should see that five train drawing in to Witley some Saturday afternoon in July. It is one of the loveliest sights in the world, looked at in the proper spirit. Of course, there are other stations on the route between Waterloo and Portsmouth worth a brief respectable stop, — Haslemere, Liphook, and Liss, for example; but not one of them begins to compare in aristocratic unction with Witley.

For quite a while before the five train is due, the pretty little station, with its name picked out in geraniums or some other railway station flower, begins to fill with excitement. It is absurdly small

and humble in appearance considering its importance — one might almost say its “fame,” even its destiny; and when the five has been signalled and is seen labouring up the last stretch of hollowed pinewood, it will become congested with struggling expectancy of a high order. Long since, the gravelled circle of roadway outside the station has been thronged with the solemn presences of smart vehicles of every conceivable fashion of smartness. The grooms and the horseflesh still hold their own, but the chauffeurs and automobiles are evidently “it” as well. Suddenly a great hand-bell clangs through the station, and the few disregarded country-folk look to their baskets and their umbrellas. An eager row of corduroy lines the platform, and the footmen fall over each other, striving to catch the faces of master or mistress as the noisy lighted windows glide into the quiet country peace. Wearing a proud feather of steam, the five o'clock train has arrived at Witley.

Suddenly the platform is filled with the most distinguished looking baggage that it is in the mind of Bond Street leather-goods-men to imagine. No matter how knocked about these trunks and portmanteaus and kit-bags may seem, they have the careless air of belonging to a nobleman. And, indiscriminately mingled with such baggage are the hardly less distinguished looking parcels of

caterers and florists: fish swathed in rushes, and hampers of inconceivable dainties, game making no attempt at concealment. Amid the elegant welter, dogs, respectfully held in leash by some unnamed representative of the feudal system, and snuffing at the Nice labels on the distinguished baggage — and everywhere such pleasant words of greeting as “Good evening, my Lord,” and “Ah! there you are, Squiggs!”

Confusion is no name for the scene, but what a distinguished confusion! — and if some great gentleman should occasionally use strong language amid the chaos, or some gentle lady lose her pretty temper over a lost hat-box, — the fact is felt to be reassuring evidence that your lords and ladies, bless them, are human, after all!

To the watchers and waiters at Witley the five train was a sudden emergence round a bend of a green light, a shrill whistle, and a thunder of lighted cars — but for a full hour its various compartments had been like so many miniature stages, each with its own characteristic drama. One would need to be Balzac even to indicate the varieties of human type and human drama concentrated between engine and luggage-van. I desire, however, to make no such hopeless experiment with the unattainable, and am, indeed, well content to confine my attention to a certain first-class carriage, which,

in spite of the congested, not to say overheated, condition of the other carriages, continued till within about five seconds of the train's starting to be occupied by one solitary majestic figure. Still no "Engaged" label accounted for its comparative emptiness. It had needed but a shilling and a guard's pass-key to work this wonder. No few hurried passengers had tried the door in vain, and looking in, with the most irate intentions, had been awed by the haughty eye-glassed presence inside, calmly reading *The Sporting Times*. One or two who had seemed determined to enter, in spite of such impressive appearances, had been cowed immediately by a word from a ticket inspector, who, promising them a seat elsewhere, whispered that "Sir Ralph Gilderoy liked to be alone." Yes! the solitary reader of *The Sporting Times* was no less a personage than Sir Ralph Gilderoy. If the name means nothing to you — it is hardly worth while enlightening your ignorance. Still, for the purpose of our story, I must say that Sir Ralph was the captain of one of the crackest cavalry regiments, and universally acclaimed as the handsomest man in the British army — which, you will admit, is saying a good deal. Though he paid no more than any other passenger, Sir Ralph not unnaturally took it for granted that his rank and distinction entitled him to ten seats as against your

average man's one — and in this feeling there was not a railway employee but was with him. Imagine then the general consternation when, within a second or two of the train's starting, a resolute young gentleman, wildly racing up the platform, with a loaded porter at his heels, stopped in front of Sir Ralph's carriage, and demanded that it should be opened to him, with an air that no official concerned with the five train could mistake — in spite of his somewhat Bohemian appearance, his long hair, soft hat, and Liberty tie. The inspector shot a despairing look at Sir Ralph, but there was no denying the new-comer's demand — a demand made with an air, I must repeat, quite as, perhaps even more, distinguished than Sir Ralph's own — so the door was opened in a twinkling, and as the new-comer seated himself in one of the corners, the train began to move with pompous slowness out of the station.

Sir Ralph had looked up from *The Sporting Times* with great "hauteur," entirely lost upon the impertinent intruder, who, giving him a casual glance, tossed his hat up into the rack, thus revealing a shock of disgustingly curly hair, and opening a small bag at his side, presently littered his corner of the compartment with books, which he handled with the manner of a man accustomed to sizing them up at a glance.

Presently he found one that seemed to hold his attention, and, tossing the rest into his bag, began to read. Sir Ralph could hardly believe that any human being could be so unconscious (unaffectedly unconscious, he was obliged to admit) of his existence. He eyed him occasionally over his paper. He was evidently a gentleman, in spite of his damnable Bohemian airs. The face and the hands were too fine, and the manner too quietly at ease, for him to be anything else, in spite of the absurdly beautiful blond hair and that outrageous socialist silk tie.

Presently the intruder took out a cigarette case, and, turning to Sir Ralph, politely asked if he objected to smoking — the compartment not being labelled “smoking.” Sir Ralph haughtily — did not object. In fact he had been aching for a cigar himself, but had disdained to ask the other’s permission. After a while the intruder, noticing that *The Sporting Times* seemed to have given out, quietly offered Sir Ralph a batch of evening papers, which Sir Ralph could not very well refuse to accept. But he despised the fellow none the less — in spite of his further observation of the lithe athleticism of the slim careless figure, the strong throat, and the well-set shoulders. And so the two made the journey to Witley together, and, as one can imagine, much to Sir Ralph’s disgust,

found that their enforced intimacy was only beginning. The intruder was out of the carriage first, and was immediately hailed by Lady Blackthorne's footman, who, taking care of his hand baggage, at the same moment saluted Sir Ralph, informing both gentlemen that the carriage was waiting outside the station. Think of it! Sir Ralph and the stranger were evidently both guests at Lady Blackthorne's house-party, and willy-nilly must put up with each other's society from Saturday till Monday. Presently the carriage was rustling its way among the tunnelled leaves of a Surrey lane, and the silence between the two men seeming to one of them rather stupid —

“Apparently,” said the stranger, “we are to be fellow-guests of Lady Blackthorne. My name is Silchester.”

“Mine,” answered the other, “is Gilderoy.”

Each knew the other by name immediately. “The devil!” said Gilderoy to himself. “Why should a man dress so out of his station?” But, after all, when a man is a lord, it does n't so much matter that he is a poet as well — and Lord Silchester was by way of being quite a distinguished poet, considering that he was barely thirty years old.

The revelation of the poet's rank did much towards clearing the atmosphere. Besides, like many gallant captains, Gilderoy had a sneaking

affection for poetry himself, and a by no means contemptible knack of turning out verses on occasion. Some of Lord Silchester's love-songs, he was generous enough to admit, he had sung now and again at regimental parties; for Gilderoy's voice was almost as fine as his figure. So, by the time the carriage brought them to their destination, the two men were in a very different relation to each other than when they had entered it.

"I'll confess," Gilderoy had said, "that as a rule I love poetry as much as I despise poets — and I trust you will excuse my saying that it is a pleasure to meet a poet who is a gentleman too."

"For my part," Lord Silchester laughingly answered, "I have always loved soldiers as much as I hate war."

And the two curiously dissimilar men shook hands on that.

Lady Blackthorne met them in the hall, surrounded by a group of young people who had evidently just loitered in from the garden to greet the new arrivals. She was in the midsummer of her widowhood, and had the sincere air of all beautiful people accustomed to worship.

After the first greetings were over, she explained to her two latest arrivals, both old friends, that owing to the superflux of beautiful young people in the absurdly small old house, she was

compelled to ask them to share the big bedroom in the west wing together. What could be more appropriate than that Mars and Apollo should lie down in peace together!

"Yes," laughed Lord Silchester, "but, when you say that, you are only providing for Captain Gilderoy — where am I to sleep?"

The compliment was not lost on Gilderoy, who, if he was professionally Mars, was surely handsome enough to be regarded as an unprofessional Apollo; and from this moment there was quite a danger of the two men becoming friends.

This gay prelude of greeting over, they went up to their room to dress for dinner. For all Lady Blackthorne's depreciation, it was a huge old room with two immense canopied beds, on one of which the soft-voiced man-servant deputed to take care of these two distinguished gentlemen had already spread out, with that impressive reverence peculiar to English men-servants, the evening clothes of Lord Silchester.

But Sir Ralph Gilderoy's portmanteau was still unemptied, and, as the two men had entered the room, Johnson had taken Sir Ralph aside and respectfully whispered him of a strange and rather embarrassing occurrence — an occurrence concerning which all his ingrained reverence for rank could hardly rob him of a respectful smile.

Gilderoy was by no means without humour, and, after the first flash of annoyance at what had been told him, he broke out into a great laugh.

“Silchester,” he said, “come over here. Here’s a go! What do you think of this?”

I have spoken of the distinguished confusion of baggage at Witley station. Here was a delicious result of it. No wonder Johnson had lost some of his traditional reserve as, opening the Captain’s portmanteau, instead of finding there the faultless shirt and so on, his astonished eyes beheld—well! it was simply this. Some young lady had been travelling by the five train whose portmanteau so closely resembled Sir Ralph’s that a highly romantic exchange had been made by the distracted porters. Readers with imagination will need no further details. As Johnson modestly displayed the portmanteau to the noblemen, Lord Silchester gave a quick little start, unnoted by his companion, and thereupon rolled upon his bed in fits of laughter. But Sir Ralph, not being a poet, was more sentimental—that is, after dismissing Johnson with a nonchalant reassurance that no doubt the mistake would soon be discovered by the lady unknown—for no initials or label upon the bag gave clue to the identity of its owner—and his own bag restored to him.

“Dear little girl,” said the Captain, whose only

weakness, one may say, was woman. "I wonder who the deuce she is. She has evidently been paying a shopping visit to town," he continued, tenderly pointing to a smart little walking skirt, and, in spite of every wish to do the gentlemanly thing, noting one or two feminine trifles, such as a particularly small and elegant pair of walking shoes, and a veil of a pattern so original you could hardly fail to recognise it again. "There is something deucedly touching about a woman, Silchester . . . Don't you think?"

For answer, Lord Silchester once more doubled himself into convulsions, in which Sir Ralph could not but make believe to join.

"Forgive me," gasped Silchester, when at last he had recovered himself, "but you will admit that it is funny. Thank Heaven it happened to you instead of to me! You can carry it off all right—but I should never have heard the end of it."

But Silchester's laughter had been so whole-hearted as almost to nettle Gilderoy with a suspicion that his very newly made friend had a private joy in his discomfiture, which suspicion Silchester perceiving made haste to allay by a subdual of his mirth, and a promise to himself that he would some day make it up to Gilderoy.

The way in which Sir Ralph took the inevitable

chaffing at dinner was a masterpiece of *savoir-faire*. The apparition of so famous a dandy in the ante-prandial drawing-room in his railway tweeds naturally provoked attention, and when Sir Ralph whispered the explanation to his hostess, she again laughed so unmercifully that the attempt to rob the rest of the company of the joke was in vain.

Over dinner a facetious bishop made a learned reference to Hercules and Omphale, which fell rather flat in an unclassical age; and Sir Ralph was made the subject of many a flippancy of which naturally he never heard.

"Really," whispered one wag to his partner, "Sir Ralph is too disgracefully décolleté."

"But what fine pearls he is wearing!" was the wicked response.

"Sir Ralph is sweetly pretty to-night, don't you think?" said another.

"A little too much of the ingénue, though," was the reply.

"I'm not sure but that a high bodice would n't suit him better, after all," said another wit. "There is a distinction about the high bodice that would go better with his severe style of beauty . . . ."

"Besides, it is hardly modest to wear one's scars so low," said another.

"But we mustn't forget that this is his first

season. When he has been out a little longer, he will soon learn to make more of himself . . .”

“Of course,” said the other, “we must wait for his first ball really to judge.”

While poor Sir Ralph was thus being made a motley to the view, a parallel scene was being enacted in a country house some six miles away. The two beautiful daughters of the Earl of Wychmere had run up to their rooms to change their frocks for dinner. As they entered the bedroom which they shared together, laughing over certain reminiscences of their trip to town, their devoted maids were busy emptying their dress-boxes, hat-boxes, etc., and returning the various articles to their accustomed places in wardrobe and closet. A woman's baggage is necessarily more voluminous than a man's, and the maids were hardly through with their task as the young ladies entered the room. They had hardly entered, however, when Anisette threw up her hands, with a little scream.

What could be the matter! Look!

Well!

So it was into this fragrant place that the faultless shirts so missed by Johnson had wandered — and the worst of it was, or the best, that Captain Gilderoy's name, of the —th Hussars, was there on the leather so plain as immediately to replace a possible mystery by a fascinating certainty. Cap-

tain Gilderoy's evening clothes! Well!—and Lady Teresa hid her face in her thick gold hair, already loosened for her maid, and her white shoulders shook with laughter,—probably at the very moment that Lord Silchester was rolling in absurd convulsions over the corresponding discovery made by Captain Gilderoy.

Then she and her raven-haired sister laughed as if their hearts would break. Lord Silchester's laughter, as I have said, was scarcely less hearty at the same moment; Gilderoy's laughter, too, had been full of courage, and the laughter at the dinner-table had been vividly infectious; but there was no laughter concerned in all this little comedy to be compared with the laughter of Lady Teresa and Lady Mary Wychmere, as they discovered Captain Gilderoy's evening clothes.

Time and again, they tried to stop it, so that they might speak a reasonable word to each other—but no! it was impossible—and once more they hid their faces, as over their shoulders swept the white cataracts of laughter.

It was a pity that Gilderoy could not have been there to hear that beautiful laughter,—for he, of all men, with his manly sentiment about women, would have realised the lovely freshness, the brook-like spontaneity of it. As Lady Teresa laughed, you naturally thought of her thick, sun-

rippled hair, and as you looked at her hair, you thought of the rippling ringlets of her laughter. O was there anything in the world quite so good to hear as Lady Teresa's laughter! And, when she and her sister laughed together, the dullest imagination dreamed of the Guadalquivir.

I will not say that it was well that Captain Gilde-roy did not keep his love-letters in his evening clothes — yet I must confess that his effects were subjected to an irresistible curiosity, such as, of course, Lady Teresa's escaped.

“It's too bad to have to send them back, is n't it?” she said, laughing, “but of course we must. Just one more look at these beautiful golf-stockings — and do you think, Mary, I might steal this adorable tie . . . and O do look at those open-worked socks . . .”

“What dainty things soldiers wear . . .” laughed Lady Mary; and then the bag was reluctantly closed, and instructions given for its immediate conveyance to Lady Blackthorne's.

It arrived during dinner, and, when an hour or so after Lady Blackthorne duly informed Sir Ralph of its arrival, she — though, of course, knowing quite well — denied any knowledge of whence it came. It had come, she said laughingly, under cover of night, in a carriage with the blinds closely drawn, and had been brought to the ser-

vants' door by a masked man with a drawn revolver in his hand . . .

Gilderoy took his roasting like the good fellow he was, and, to tell the truth, in his heart, which was, as I have hinted, far more romantically made than his exterior indicated, thought far more of the romantic side of the quaint incident than of the ludicrous. They could laugh all they pleased — but Gilderoy personally felt that he had the best of it. Chance had selected him for a charming suggestion of possible adventure. The strange portmanteau of Beauty had come to him — instead of, say, to Silchester.

“I consider it,” he said laughingly, in answer to some more badinage of Silchester’s, as the two men were turning in, “a personal compliment from Fate — and you know, well enough, that you are only jealous because it did n’t happen to you.”

At this last remark Silchester once more fell into absurd hysterics.

“How deucedly touching women are, eh! Gilderoy?” he continued, when he had recovered his breath. “And,” he added, “to be quite serious, have you ever thought how romantic a woman’s belongings are, compared with a man’s! You fell in love with those little shoes, I saw at a glance, and would probably have kissed them but for the presence of Johnson. Now, I wonder what the

mysterious lady thought of those elegant bedroom slippers there. Tread upon them softly, Gilderoy — who knows but that before she sent them back she kissed them on each dear little sole. Perhaps even she leaned out of her window in the moonlight — leaned out and gathered a climbing rose — gathered it, Gilderoy, with her beautiful white arm gleaming in the moonlight, and tucked it into one of the touching toes — are you sure you looked properly before you put them on? If I were you, I should have another look . . . ”

For answer, Gilderoy took off the slippers and flung them with excellent aim at his already recumbent companion, and himself thereupon took shelter between the sheets.

“I say,” he said presently, “I suppose you have n't a volume of your poems with you. I don't feel in the least sleepy . . . ”

“One for you!” laughed Silchester; “no! I'm afraid I have n't, but I think I can remember a very short one that exactly fits your case . . . ”

“Go on,” answered Gilderoy dreamily, out of the darkness.

And Silchester recited, with mock unction:

Long after you are dead  
I will kiss the shoes of your feet,  
And the long, bright hair of your head  
Will go on being sweet;

In each little thing you wore  
We shall go on meeting, love ;  
In a ring we shall meet,  
In a fan we shall meet,  
Or a long-forgotten glove.  
Long after you are dead,  
O the bright hair of your head,  
And the shoes of your little feet !

“ I ’ll forgive you the chaff for the verses,” retorted Gilderoy. “ You are not worthy of having written them, Silchester — strange chaps, you poets — you seem to feel everything, yet feel nothing. Say them again ” ; and Silchester laughingly repeated.

“ Will you copy them out for me to-morrow? ”

“ Certainly ! ” answered the poet, with difficulty stifling a new convulsion which he really felt to be too bad in the present condition of the Captain’s feelings.

“ How did those first two lines go? ” asked the Captain, after a while.

But the poet was fast asleep.

In a day or two the various members of the party which had been so diverted by Captain Gilderoy’s adventure were scattered about the counties, taking their shining places in other social constellations, and, a fortnight afterwards, Sir Ralph was staying down in Devonshire with a friend to

whom he was deeply attached, on account of an exceptionally fine trout stream that ran through his domain. Gilderoy, like all real soldiers, had a great capacity for, and delight in, silence; and that, together with the love of the sport for its own sake, made him an ardent fisherman. He asked nothing better than a long, lonely day with his rod, and a wandering meditative stream; and, if some days he had bad luck with his fishing, he made up for it in dreaming. He would, of course, have been the last to admit it, but not infrequently on his fishing excursions he might have been found under a hawthorn bush by the stream's side scribbling verses, instead of catching trout. For, indeed, as Lady Blackthorne had implied, Mars and Apollo were always closely related.

On the particular afternoon, however, on which I desire next to introduce him to the reader, he had taken his rod seriously, as the silver and rose in his fishing basket bore witness. It is true that now and again, as the afternoon sunshine fell softly about him through the trees, and gleamed here and flitted there, lighting up the secrecies of the stream, that his fancy would go a-wandering — as the bravest man's might, under conditions suggestive of romance even more alluring than the heaviest trout that was ever glazed into immortality in gun-room or country inn. There have been those

who, ostensibly going a-fishing, have seen the naiads; and it must be difficult, I should think, for the most prosaic nature to spend a whole day by a stream-side without some haunted feeling of the possible apparition of some mysterious beauty, or the sense that something wonderful was about to happen to him, something even more wonderful than — trout. At last this feeling threw its spell so completely over Gilderoy, as the golden bloom on the afternoon grew deeper, that he decided he had caught all the trout he cared about, and threw himself down by the stream-side in a mood of enchanted reverie, much more in the spirit of

“Such sights as youthful poets dream  
In summer eves by haunted stream,”

than any of his friends could have believed of him.

As he thus lay, with his eyes idly fixed on a shining reach of water up-stream, a bend of glory before the stream entered a Delphic avenue of muttering shade, he noticed, suddenly specking the broad swathe of unrippled light, a tiny black object, like some small water-bird in the mid-current. A curiosity, as idle as his reverie, kept his eyes on it till it disappeared in the shadows, and kept them waiting in idle expectancy for its reappearance in another space of light a few yards

away from him. Who has not watched the adventures of some broken branch, or equally important object, with the caprices of a rocky stream, held one's breath at its dangers, drawn breath again, and even hurrahed, as it detached itself from some ensnaring obstacle, and once more floated triumphantly on its way? In just this spirit Gilderoy awaited the emergence into daylight of the tiny black object, whatever it might be, and silently made bets with himself on its chances of surviving the unknown perils of the shadows. So long, however, was this in coming about that he had given up hope, and was on the point even of forgetting it, when, lo! it suddenly appeared on the edge of the light, coquetting with an eddy. Gilderoy, who had looked upon the five-pound note which he had laid upon it as lost, sat up and boyishly clapped his hands.

"Bravo!" he cried, sitting up, and, alert again with the keenness of a sportsman, "Bravo! — but what the deuce is it? . . ." for, though it was still too far away for him clearly to distinguish it, there was something about its shape that piqued his curiosity. Presently it swung out of the eddy, and started swiftly again on the full current.

"By Jove!" Gilderoy shouted, suddenly springing up, and splashing through the shallow stream, careless of his beautiful golf-stockings. He was

just in time to save the little derelict from plunging down a small fall, at the bottom of which it would probably have been sunk for ever — though I am inclined to think that rather than have allowed that to happen, Gilderoy would have instantly stripped and dived for it — for beyond all shadow of doubt this little dainty craft that had come gliding so bravely down the stream . . .

Well, when Gilderoy had cried “Bravo” and splashed in, what was it he had seen? A woman’s shoe delicately floating to him — out of fairy-land!

Remembering how deucedly touching woman seemed to Gilderoy, you can imagine how the incident appealed to him. A woman’s lonely little shoe thus floating all unprotected and uncared for on this perilous stream. This he would have felt on general principles, but, please, further imagine, if you can, his feelings when he *recognised* the shoe!

Yes! as I began to say, beyond all shadow of doubt, this was one of *her* shoes, one of those two that, as Silchester had truthfully said, he had felt like kissing that evening at Lady Blackthorne’s.

Seated on the bank, he turned it over and over, and presently devoted his attention to drying it reverently by means of the long grass and a handkerchief. There was no doubt at all! It was

hers. He would have known it anywhere — even in a shoe-shop. Bless it! And this time he kissed it without shame —

“ Long after you are dead  
I will kiss the shoes of your feet . . . ”

He had for days been vaguely in love with the unknown owner of this little shoe. But this second strange accident settled it. Accident! No doubt materialistic critics might call it mere coincidence — and if Silchester had been there, he would unquestionably have had another attack of his absurd hysterics. Coincidence indeed! Be reasonable. Could anything be a plainer indication of the purposes of Fate than that this very shoe should thus come into his hand a whole day's journey from the place where he had first seen it — and in so manifestly miraculous a fashion! Anyhow, what does the puerile criticism of the spectator ever matter to a man in love? And yes! Gilderoy was in love — he said it out loud to the stream, and, if any trout were still alive in his basket, they heard it too; not to speak of various birds that thereupon flew off in all directions like messenger-boys to tell the whole wide world that Captain Gilderoy was in love! In love! with whom! Realism would answer with a number three shoe! But there is a magic intuition in love which, as

it was possible to guess at Hercules from his foot, so is it an easy matter for a lover to build up beauty from her shoe! *Ex pede Venere!*

While Gilderoy was thus sentimentalising over Beauty's slipper, Beauty, about a mile up stream, had awakened to a more practical concern for it. It was, no doubt, all the world to Gilderoy, but it was even more to Lady Teresa Wychmere, with two or three miles of woodland between her and Wildwoods Manor. Suddenly news of her distress seemed to be carried on the breeze to Gilderoy.

"Of course. By Jove!" he exclaimed, picking up his rod and basket, and starting up stream. "What a fool I am!" I may be too late to help her, with my confounded sentimentalising . . ." Need one say that what he meant was: "I may be too late to see her!"

So up the stream-side hastened Gilderoy — and, meanwhile, if ever there was a picture of beauty in distress, surely it was the Lady Teresa. And she was Beauty Courageous as well, and full of merriment at her plight. Some one once said that her laughter was like the laughter of a nymph at the bottom of a well — and, as she laughed to herself by the stream-side, it would have been hard to tell whether it were she or the stream that made so happy a rippling in the solitude.

But to think of the stream running off with her shoe in that way — that innocent-looking stream. An hour ago the absolute solitude of the place, and the luxurious afternoon sunshine laden with sleepy perfume, had stirred her wild young senses, just as, a mile below, it had touched to sentiment the martial heart of Gilderoy; and the irresistible lure of running water, so fresh and cool, and shot with a myriad golden reflections, had so possessed her that she forgot what a great girl she was nowadays, and, drawing off her shoes and stockings, had delighted to paddle up and down the rocky shallows like a child. There was no Antæus present to report the lovely picture she made, and to attempt to imagine it would more than likely seriously offend a certain gentleman who has long since set the seal of a lover's ownership on all that beauty.

But there can surely be no harm in saying how bravely her beautiful head caught the sun, and how her thick gold hair, loosened with the glee of her sport, shone and glittered, as though all the gold in the world had been heaped up there in one exquisite consolidation. How vivid with the pure beam of life were her fearless blue eyes, how filled with the fire and sap of existence her noble body, so lithely poised amid the inequalities of the rocky stream. Yes! — and at the risk of offending the

gentleman just referred to, it must be said that the feet of Nicolete, by the side of which, that night she fled from Beaucaire, the daisies themselves seemed dark, cannot have been whiter than those for which, though as yet they knew it not, one shoe was already missing; for, while the Lady Teresa was thus disporting herself, one of her shoes had silently slipped from the rock on which it had been insecurely placed, and been eagerly carried off by the river — to experience adventures with which we are already acquainted.

After she had thus played the girl again for some little time, her charming unconsciousness was suddenly succeeded by an abrupt return to her grown-up womanhood — and the blood mounted to her cheeks as she hastily sought the river bank with its protective conventionalities in the shape of shoes and stockings. What had she done! For all she knew, the woods were full of eyes — poachers at the very least. And what a head of hair! With a curious instinct of woman, it was her loosened hair to which she gave her first attention! Letting it fall down in a Danae-shower about her — O unseeing eyes of the woodland! — she had quickly coiled it up again into a presentable crown of glory. And now her stockings — and now her — shoes!

But, as we know, only one shoe remained.

Then it was that she laughed and laughed at the absurd lark of it, and then it was — and providentially not a moment earlier — that Gilderoy, coming up-stream, heard a laughter that, to repeat a phrase of his which I have already used, seemed like the laughter of a nymph at the bottom of a well. Strangely enough, too, there was something about its *timbre* that recalled Silchester.

Lady Teresa saw him a few yards away, on the opposite side of the stream — such, at first sight, seemed his bad luck — saw him long enough to make two observations: first, that he was carrying her slipper, and, second, that she had seen him — or, rather, some of him — before! The second observation puzzled her for a moment, and then remembering, she bent her beautiful head on her knees, and laughed again, so whole-heartedly that Gilderoy was more and more reminded how Silchester had laughed that night at Lady Blackthorne's.

He, on his part, had not failed to notice her shoeless foot, and, happy at heart at the sight, her laughter only made him the happier. As the lost shoe had begun it, surely her laughter completed their introduction. When she lifted up her beautiful head to make an excuse for her foolishness, she found that he had already forded the stream and stood by her side with her shoe in his hand.

“How good you are! please forgive me,” she

said. "How can I thank you —" and then she added archly — "Sir Ralph Gilderoy . . ."

"You know me!" said Gilderoy, in rapturous surprise.

"Some of you, at any rate, Sir Ralph," she answered; and then giving him a lovely mischievous smile, she added: "I'm so glad you got those beautiful golf-stockings back safely . . ."

"You don't mean to say . . ." gasped Gilderoy.

"Yes!" she nodded, as she fastened on her recovered shoe. "Yes! I mean to say . . ."

"But, becoming as they are," she added after a pause chiefly occupied by the running of the river, "I think you had better come up with me to the Manor, and have them changed for dry ones. My brother, Lord Silchester, whom you know, is staying there with me, and he will look after you . . ."

"Lord Silchester is your brother?"

"Yes! Did n't you know . . ."

"Now I begin to understand . . ."

"Understand what?"

"Well, why Silchester laughed so—and laughed so like you—the night our portmanteaux crossed . . ."

And so the two strolled up together through the woods to the Manor.

"Fancy your remembering my shoe," said the Lady Teresa.

"Yes! but fancy your remembering my golf-stockings," said Gilderoy.

And of such is the kingdom of heaven.



# OLD SILVER



## OLD SILVER

**W**HENEVER one of those memory-days is coming round which give me the opportunity of showing Well-Beloved how much I love her, and how glad I am that she came to be born, I invariably turn my steps, often weeks beforehand, to the Shop of Dreams. This is an antiquity shop whose window, filled with old silver, old lace, old violins, and such-like matters of memory and dream, is no little of an anachronism in one of the busiest shopping streets of New York. The elevated railway thunders but a block away, and cross-town cars flash by — the fan that once waved in the hand of the Pompadour, or the slippers that once held the little feet of Marie Antoinette.

One of the ways in which I contrive to retain the affection of Well-Beloved is by my ministering to her passion for old silver. It comes over her at more or less regular intervals, and I am always on the lookout to appease it, and often it happens that just as her love seems to be slipping away

from me I call it back by the luckily timed gift of a filigree cardcase, a pair of Regency shoe-buckles, or a fancifully devised vinaigrette.

Wonderfully unlike all other women, Well-Beloved is unlike them in this also, that she cares nothing for modern trinkets, however costly, and takes no heed of the great goldsmiths' windows as we walk the streets together. Three parts of the pleasure in her various bibelots is the touch of human history upon them, the faint fragrance of forgotten dreams. Modern jewels, however beautiful, are, to her way of thinking, mere raw material. "They have never lived," she is fond of saying. "Wait till they come, as some day they surely will, to our Shop of Dreams, with the mark of tears upon them, tarnished with sighs, worn with kisses — then they will be really beautiful. But as yet they mean nothing. Their value is still to come."

Thus I have never bought diamonds for Well-Beloved, for they would give her no pleasure; but, as I said, whenever a red-letter day falls to be celebrated, I turn my feet to the Shop of Dreams, and, after long inspection of its storied window, all that romantic wreckage thrown up there by the sea of life as upon a shore, I turn the handle of the gate of ivory and enter into a hades of Empire frivolities, eight-day clocks, damascened armour,

cameos from the bosoms of our grandmothers, old snuff-boxes, and dead men's rings.

The proprietor is himself no little of a sentimentalist, and he is attractively learned in the history of the dream-things it is his charming business to sell. He and I are long since old friends, and he allows me to drop in and prowl about the nooks and corners of the centuries without a thought of traffic. Many are the hours I have spent with him recalling the story of this or that relic, and he is long since well aware of "madame's" insatiable appetite for old silver.

A little while ago I called in and found him in the characteristic act of examining an antique through the little magnifying glass which is always more or less screwed into his right eye, and with which, as I tell him, I verily believe he goes to bed at nights. He looked up at me and nodded, without removing the glass.

"Excuse me a moment," he said, returning to his antique, "I have something to show you."

When he had completed his examination, he called me from my contemplation of an exceptionally fine Etruscan vase, and, taking a packet from a drawer, began to unfold it.

"What will madame say to this, do you think?" he said, smiling, as he revealed a superb silver

cross, carved with vine-leaves and set in its centre with a large four-sided amethyst.

“I say!” I exclaimed.

“Yes, it’s a fine thing, is n’t it? They don’t often come into one’s hands. A veritable bishop’s cross. French, of course. Early eighteenth-century, I should say. You notice the mitre; and the amethyst, you see, stands for the cushion. Here are the tassels at each corner of the setting. It is a reliquary, too,” and he turned it over. “You see how it opens at the back . . . But here is something to delight madame. Look, is n’t it human, the eternal feminine — does n’t it touch your heart?”

He had opened a little door at the back of the cross, and there, inside, instead of the expected piece of blessed bone, or fragment of the true Cross, what do you think was there? A tiny powder-puff!

O woman! woman!

“How Catholic!” I exclaimed; “and I’ll wager she was a good little devout Catholic for all that!”

“She is that — poor little woman, if ever there was one,” said my friend, with more than usual sympathy in his voice.

“You know her then?” said I.

“Yes! I know her,” he said. Then presently he continued: “You will notice that this powder-

puff contrivance, this little lid here, is comparatively new. Ten years old, maybe. It was just a freak of her gay little head — in the days when it was still gay.”

My eye had for a moment wandered away and fallen upon a picture that I had never noticed in the shop before.

“Where did you get that picture?” I exclaimed.

“Stunning, is n’t it?” he answered.

It was a modern picture, a singularly vivid impression of a crowded centre of New York at twilight — Thirty-third Street and Broadway at the rush hour, with the elevated coming up against a smoky sunset; a picture filled with the poetry of modern cities.

“Though you would n’t think it,” said my friend, as I turned once more to the bishop’s cross, “the cross and the picture belong to each other.”

And then he told me a story.

Some eight or ten years before the bishop’s cross came into the possession of Well-Beloved there was a certain young man, in an exceedingly wild and woolly Western town, who had been inconveniently gifted by nature with the unreasonable desire to paint beautiful things. Yes! it became more and more evident to his perplexed and disappointed connections that Paul Channing was

born, or rather doomed, to be an artist. But for this disconcerting tendency, he might have taken advantage of the reversion of a prosperous dry-goods store belonging to his father, and thus reposed upon a prosaic "certainty," instead of whimsically choosing the very precarious uncertainty of the life of art. His case, too, presented an additional peculiarity and difficulty which deserve mentioning. His choice of subjects was so bewildering.

The town of Busiris was by no means without a certain appreciation of art — that is, art of a certain kind, a very fixed and certain kind. It allowed a certain mysterious importance to the artist who painted subjects from "the Greek," Italian landscapes, sacred pieces, or, in short, anything that had been painted so often before that it had become quite natural and recognized to paint it — waterfalls, say, or mountain scenery, or sensational shipwrecks. Animals, or "still life," reproduced with recognizable fidelity, the town of Busiris was prepared to accept. But, alas! Paul Channing cared to paint none of these things — and he defended his disinclination with extraordinary heresies. The mere fact of these subjects having been painted so much, he said, was reason enough for his painting something else. The business of the painter was to paint new beauty, and thus re-

veal it to eyes that had yet to find it out. There was no need to go so far afield for beauty. It was at our very doors. It was everywhere about us, rainbowing our common lot and commonplace surroundings. Our very offices and factories were beautiful, seen in the proper light and with the right eyes. There were moments when Busiris was as beautiful as the Parthenon — though, of course, in a different way. Italy! Greece! No, America was beautiful enough for Paul Channing. He would be the painter of America. One would rather have expected Busiris to welcome this patriotic leaning in its young artist. But, curiously enough, this choice of subject seemed to be the most incomprehensible of all his vagaries. America was useful, indeed — but beautiful! No, that was no part of its business — and it was all in vain that Paul painted the Joplin Soap Works at sunset, or caught the romantic expression of the shoe factory by moonlight. Nor were his impressions of the “limited” coming in from Chicago, or of a crowded trolley-car at the rush hour, more convincing to his fellow-citizens.

So it was that, partly in disgust and partly in search of new subject-matter, he decided to go East. He had once been to Chicago, and loved a sky-scraper in course of erection; and for a long while he had dreamed of painting New York, with

its turreted peninsula, singing like a forest of stone in the breath of the Atlantic.

Paul, with the fierce independence of the artistic young, refused to accept anything of the proffered aid of a father, perplexed but kindly, beyond his fare and a hundred dollars, which he was confident of repaying a week or two after his arrival in New York out of the appreciation of a more sympathetic public.

So it was that Paul Channing came to New York, and found cheap yet pleasant rooms in the neighbourhood of Washington Square. He was not entirely friendless in his new home, for, as it always providentially happens with artists, though so far away from New York, he had already been found out by two or three experimental young painters whose studios were round the corner from his lodging, and letters from whom had done no little toward keeping him alive out there in Busiris. But he did not immediately advise them of his presence in New York, for the reason that he wanted to have the city all to himself for a little while—a sort of artistic honeymoon. He shrank from the risk of anyone else displaying it to him. He knew how he was going to love it, and he knew—so he thought, in that sublime self-confidence of youth which wins most of the battles of life—that he needed no one's assistance to see

whatever beauty belonged to it. It was going to be his city. He had dreamed of it for months, even years, and now at last he was come to paint it. So days, even weeks, went by, without his even thinking of being lonely; for the beautiful city was more beautiful than he had dared to dream it, and the days were too short for him, as he sat with his sketch-book and strove to fix his rapt impressions of its adventurous, even foolhardy, charm. He would spend whole days on ferryboats just to look at that wonderful sky-line of office-buildings resolutely, even sternly, insisting, without a thought of beauty — and yet so terribly beautiful, with the terrible beauty of power. So the beauty of cities had always come about, he said to himself. Strong men had needed strong buildings for their merchandise, their cannon, or their prayers, and from the sincerity of their strength the stone had soared and massed itself together, and, because it was real, had unconsciously become beautiful.

After a while he had made so many sketches that he felt the need of showing them to some one, and so called on his fellow-artists — thereon to become quite a small lion among them. Here was the man they had all been looking for! And soon the name of Channing was being mysteriously passed on from studio to studio, as the latest esoteric man of the future. This was naturally

gratifying to the young painter, but, as it did no more than confirm his own quiet idea of himself, it in no way turned his head. On the contrary, it had the uncommon effect of concentrating him upon his artistic purpose, and of once more secluding him from the generously eager society that now began to seek him. Paul was so far, at all events, a true artist that the praise he received did not paralyse him with self-satisfaction; it simply certificated a dream and a hope. As a rule, the young artist is so intoxicated with the first fragrance of his first laurels that they send him to sleep upon them, never to wake again. But Paul was different. He realised that the budding laurel is very liable to blight, and that from no cause is it so liable to languish as the laureate's own neglect. Therefore he absented himself from facile adulation, and shut his door and lived with his sketch-book and his canvases.

But, being a painter, his room necessarily had windows, and looking through them one day, he saw a beautiful face. A beautiful face was somewhat irrelevant to Paul — for his dreams had been all of beautiful buildings. However, the face was so beautiful that he was compelled to look at it again, and again and again. The face was bent over a strip of embroidery, the beautiful face that was evidently striving to catch all the light of a

cloudy day. There was a sad little garden to the house where Paul lodged, and it was by so much as its few yards of dank and disappointed greenery that the industrious little seamstress and Paul were divided from each other. But Paul was some seven stories high, and the unknown beautiful face sewed for ten hours of the day on a level with the garden. Paul saw her smitten by a strong top-light, which irradiated her head with glory. She gave no evidence of ever catching sight of him, and indeed may have been entirely unconscious that his eyes were on her so often and so long each day. Dimly seen, seated a little way from the window, was an old lady who worked in company with her, on similar lengths of needlework, and, the month being June, the two sat with the window open, and sometimes waifs of their talk — happy, laughing talk — and little songs, frailly sweet, would float up into Paul's open windows. But the laughter was all he could understand, for the words belonged to a language foreign to him. French, he said to himself, though he neither spoke nor read that beautiful tongue, and French surely was that dark beauty so vivid, so distinguished, so brilliantly brunette. As he looked on it, Paul recalled the lines of an Eastern poet :

“ Did you ever see a woman  
Quite so black, yet quite so fair ! ”

And, day by day, the face at the window, up and bright and industrious often in the very dew of dawn, came to mean more to him, more and more to pique his curiosity and stir his sense of wonder. It was so exquisite a face, and the life of this unknown mother and daughter — though they were evidently poor and hard working — suggested a certain sad distinction; was, so to say, so “aristocratic” in its refinement. So a dowager and a young queen in exile might ply their needles for a livelihood with haughty industry.

If Paul’s studio had had many visitors, it could hardly have escaped notice that his sky-scrapers were for the moment in eclipse, and that studies of a certain beautiful head occupied all the available spaces of easel and wall, chair and even bedstead. Temporarily the river-front had lost its fascination, and the sketches and canvases littered about that were not occupied with the beautiful face were, mysteriously enough, given up to sketches of a not particularly beautiful cat. It was not Paul’s own cat. No cat shared his studio with him, and up till now cats had never attracted him. I suppose it is not hard to guess that it was a cat that drowsed on the window-ledge of the unknown, as she sat at her work — the third member of the family.

One evening when Paul returned from a walk he

was somewhat startled to find this little friend of hers curled up on his divan, in the deep, pathetic sleep of petted, trustful animals. Pussy opened her eyes sleepily, but did not stir, and suffered him to stroke her without protest, presently purring by way of friendship. As Paul stroked her, he said to himself over and over, "Her little cat!" and then he looked out to see if there were any signs of agitation in the window below. The blind was undrawn, and a lamp burned on a little table, but the chair was empty. Perhaps Black-as-Night—as in his thoughts he had long since called the stranger—was out looking for her pet. It was natural to suppose that she was very unhappy at its loss, and very unlikely that she should guess the best place to look. Obviously it was Paul's privilege to do Mademoiselle Gabrielle Chartier a real service—for he had made it his business to learn her name—and possibly . . . Well, at all events, it was wonderfully in his power to send her to bed easier in her mind than she could otherwise have gone with "her little cat" wandering out of doors—heaven knows where. There was a broad blue ribbon round pussy's neck, and Paul bethought him that he might allow himself so much reward as to attach to it one of those portraits of "her little cat," with the compliments of the artist. This he thereupon did, and

having made Pussy happy with a long drink of milk, they set out together. Arrived at Mademoiselle Chartier's door, his knock was answered by a maid-servant, who, acknowledging the receipt of pussy, volunteered the information that mademoiselle was out, looking for her, and would, she was sure, be proportionately grateful.

Returning to his studio, Paul watched the lonely lamp for a full hour, but nothing happened. Then, deciding to smoke his bedtime pipe and drink his usual nightcap, he left his window a moment or two. When he returned, the lamp down there was no longer burning.

Black-as-Night had evidently come home and found her little pussy-cat all safe. Before she put out the lamp — had she looked up at his window with a momentary gratitude? He felt that she must have done that anyhow — and what did she think of the picture of “her little cat”?

These questions were, in some degree, answered by a dainty note that came to him next evening, in which Mademoiselle Gabrielle Chartier acknowledged Mr. Channing's great kindness in restoring her precious pet, and wished to thank him, too, for the pretty sketch. Only, she could not help adding that Mr. Channing had failed to note a very uncommon characteristic of “her little cat”: the white ring around her tail — the Ring-o'-Roses, as

she called it. Otherwise the portrait was perfect, and Mademoiselle Chartier begged once more to express her gratitude to the artist.

Paul naturally looked out of his window for the next day or two with unusual interest, though it was hard on him that he had to take more care now than before, lest he should attract attention, and thus seem to be claiming the acquaintance of a smile. Black-as-Night was there, punctual and industrious as before, but, so far as he could observe, she seemed no more conscious of the studio on the seventh floor than formerly. Her beautiful head was bent over her stitchery with the same day-by-day absorption, and her beautiful hands sped the needle and the coloured silks as industriously as before. And in the shadow, a little away from the window, an old lady plied a needle and thread on the glowing tapestry — and on the window-sill “her little cat” blinked lazily in the sun — with unmistakably that ring of white roses around her tail.

Several days passed, and Black-as-Night worked at her window, and Ring-o'-Roses sunned herself on the window-sill, and the summer days went by. But Paul had fallen unaccountably idle, and the incident of “her little cat” seemed as closed as a marble tomb. Paul left his door open several evenings, in the hope that Ring-o'-Roses might be

tempted once more to go in search of adventures; but—no! “her little cat” stayed at home. Then it occurred to Paul that possibly it might not be taking undue advantage of an opportunity to make a more careful study of Ring-o’-Roses, with special regard to the unique decoration of her tail. To this end he bought a powerful opera-glass, so that he might make no mistakes this time—and he made it a point of honour with himself that he would look only at Ring-o’-Roses, and not, in the weakest moment, take advantage of her beautiful little mistress. Indeed, he was not hypocritical in this, and I trust the reader will not blame him if one day he could not resist the temptation of looking at the pattern she was working upon, and if, following the pattern, his eyes, so to say, eaves-dropped upon her beautiful hands—and then made a sudden theft of her face. But for this Paul was so remorseful that he shut up his glasses and used them no more. He would not look in those beautiful eyes by stealth, would not be a thief of their privacy. If some day—yes, if some day they cared to give up their pure depths to his gaze—well, ah, how well it would be! But to filch their solemn quietude, to come secretly upon their silence—no, Paul already loved Black-as-Night too much for that.

But she could hardly resent his sending her

what he called "Ring-o'-Roses — Corrected Portrait." The sketch could not fail to give her pleasure, and somehow he felt that she would divine that, supposing her interest in the sketch did not extend to the artist, he was not the man to trouble her with further reminders of his existence.

So the new portrait of Ring-o'-Roses was duly finished with great care, and directed to Mademoiselle Chartier, and — was it wrong of her? — Black-as-Night looked up at the studio next morning and — smiled.

Black-as-Night presently followed up her smile with a note in which Mademoiselle Chartier thanked Mr. Channing for the sketch, and added that she and her mother would be glad if he could take tea with them on the following Thursday afternoon. Perhaps it is unnecessary to say that Mr. Channing was proud to accept the invitation. So Thursday afternoon found him seated inside the very room, and in the very chair by the window, which had so long been mysterious and dreamlike for him.

Mademoiselle talked English exceptionally well for a Frenchwoman, talked it better, indeed, to Paul's way of thinking, than most American girls, because she added to it the daintiest suggestion of a French accent. Her mother, a frail little old lady, talked English hardly at all, but there was no need for her

to talk. She was as silently expressive of the distinguished charm of the old French world as a piece of old lace — or those sacred embroideries which she and her daughter worked on, in the spirit of lay sisters, for the holy, beauty-loving church to which they belonged. In a modest way they had quite a reputation for their skill with their needles, and Madame Chartier would tell with pride of her little daughter, during her education at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, before the disastrous days when M. Chartier, having lost all his money through the war, had died and left them penniless — how the good sisters had named her *Doigts d'Or*, because of her skill even as a child. Whenever there was some particularly difficult piece of needlework to be done it was always brought to little *Doigts d'Or*.

Presently *Doigts d'Or* poured out tea with the golden fingers, and *Ring-o'-Roses* came in from the window-sill, with a curious little interrogative purr, which was plainly a request for milk. *Doigts d'Or* poured out a saucerful for her, stroking her affectionately as she did so.

“I suppose she is not really beautiful,” she said; “but then, you see, we love her; and love makes anything seem beautiful — don't you think?” turning her rich brown eyes full on his face. It was the first time he had thus looked into them.

How deep they were, cloudless as a southern sky, and pure as a child's!

Yes; such a child she was, yet so profoundly, so exquisitely, so benignantly, so tragically, a woman. Eyes more acquainted with the external characteristics of woman than Paul's — which, as we have seen, had, up till now, mainly occupied themselves with public buildings — in addition to applauding her beauty, would have been able, scientifically, so to say, to divine in Gabrielle, in uncommon possession, those even rarer and more precious qualities of womanhood which have made the Madonna the supreme type of human worship. Perhaps older and sadder eyes than Paul's are needed to see and appreciate these qualities immediately and at their work; that infinite fidelity which no wrong-doing can estrange, which withstands all the shocks of fate and time, and that divine tenderness which keeps open for us, when all other havens are closed, the arms of its immeasurable consolation.

Ah, yes! Gabrielle was indeed beautiful, but she was more. All over her sacred womanhood it was written that she was, too, the perfect mate, the woman men have died to — lose; all that is concentrated in the word of all words which enshrines the indestructible loyalty of human feeling, that word so sweet to be so strong, the word — wife.

Paul was too inexperienced to know how much more the word wife means than the beautiful girl we marry; but he was already deeply in love with the beautiful girl, and she — well, when a woman like Gabrielle is going to love a man she is not long in making up her mind. But she takes some time to call it “love” even to herself. She knew she liked Paul’s blond curling hair, and his brave gray eyes, and she liked the way he shook hands. They were strong, clean hands, she said to herself, and she looked forward to his holding her little bird of a hand in his again. And, these important matters being silently understood, Paul took leave, going away enriched with Madame Chartier’s promise for herself and daughter to pay a return visit to his studio on an early day.

The day was naturally a long time coming, but it came, and, for the first time, women’s skirts — angelic sound! — rustled into Paul’s bachelor solitude. How wonderful it was to have such wonderful visitors! Paul could not only have kissed the hem of Gabrielle’s pretty black-silk skirt, but the hem of her old mother’s also. He took them to the window, and together they looked down at Ring-o’-Roses sitting in the sun on the window-ledge. To think that they were actually up here with him to-day, and looking down, as he had so often looked, without a thought

that that beautiful Doigts d'Or would some day bend her face out of his window so thrillingly near his!

Of course, there were many sketches to be examined, and Paul grew happier still as he saw, with that instinct of the artist that cannot be deceived, that Doigts d'Or *knew*. It was clear that she saw his artistic dream, and was able to appreciate his success. His heart gave a great sigh of gladness at realising this. Presently Doigts d'Or mentioned the work of a certain young French painter who also was given up to the beauty of cities, and Paul's confession that he knew nothing of French painting, not even of anything French — beyond his visitors! — led to Doigts d'Or talking of her beautiful French poets . . .

Were they French songs that sometimes floated like silver butterflies up into his window? he asked. There was one he loved so . . . but, of course, he could n't remember the words — not even hum the tune.

“ Could it be ‘ *L'aube nait et ta porte est close* ’ ? ” Gabrielle asked, “ or perhaps ‘ *Le Roi d'Yvetot* ’ ? ”

But Paul did not know, adding that he might dare to ask her to teach him some of the songs, if it were not like asking a bird to teach one how to sing.

Doigts d'Or laughed, and, having translated to her mother, Madame Chartier shook her head playfully at him, and said that "*Messieurs les artistes*" were dangerous flatterers.

Before they left, Paul summoned up courage to bring out from a hiding-place, where it had been hurried away with others, what he considered his best sketch of Black-as-Night. She blushed deeply, but her eyes glowed with pleasure, as she recognised herself, and her old mother was evidently won from that moment. Paul explained that he would beg Madame Chartier's acceptance of the sketch, but it was so imperfect, etc. — yet if only she would allow her daughter to sit for him, he might hope to do something more worthy. His visitors protested against his wasting his time in such a fashion, but Paul retorted by a business-like proposition. He should paint mademoiselle's portrait, and she should teach him some of those little French songs. She need not waste her much more precious time either, but could go on with her needlework while he painted. So it was a bargain, and Doigts d'Or agreed to fix an early day — to sit for the picture, to teach monsieur French, and to work hard at her embroidery, all at once. Clearly, there would be little margin left for such industrious young people to get into mischief.

Quite two sittings, if not three, came and went with exemplary industry. Doigts d'Or's face grew on the canvas, the length of stitchery grew on her lap, and Paul's knowledge of French had progressed as far as a respectable mastery of the auxiliary verbs; for it had seemed best to begin his studies in this humble way rather than with those airy, delicate lyrics from old France or modern Provence, which, though so simple and bird-like on Doigts d'Or's lips, were found, after all, to exist by a complicated linguistic organism which, it was to be feared, it would take her pupil some time to master. They seemed so easy to have made, so divinely natural to sing, but O how grim with grammar and stiff with learning they became the moment one tried to learn them for one's self! It was as though one should study the anatomy of a nightingale.

It was, I think, on the occasion of the fourth sitting that suddenly Paul lost all patience with the conditional imperfect tense of "*avoir*," and at the same time, throwing down his brushes, likewise brought to a standstill the golden fingers, and holding them still on Gabrielle's lap, as he kneeled in front of her, looked a long look into her face, and told her what they had both known in their hearts — with that mysterious intuition of love — the moment they had first spoken together. O

the dear words — how often they have been spoken, how often written, how often printed ; but let us print them once more. Even in print how they breathe incense and thrill with wonder !

“ I love you,” said Paul.

“ I love you,” answered Gabrielle, taking his brows in the golden fingers, O so tenderly, so tenderly — and as she looked at him her brown eyes filled with tears.

Is there anything so infinitely sad as complete happiness? And for these two life's one completely happy moment had come. O golden moment, stay for ever ! Let love remain just as it is in this first moment of its transfiguring avowal, an altar-flame of perfect fire, a newly open flower divinely drunk with all the dews of heaven.

Hardly less happy was Madame Chartier herself when the young people went that very afternoon, and told her their love and asked for her blessing, and, when the day approached which there was no necessity long to defer, she brought from unsuspected hiding-places a dowry of lace and fine linen and old silver which made Gabrielle clap her hands for joy and pride. How clever our quiet old mothers can be when they have a mind to !

So it came about that Paul and Gabrielle were married — the difficulty of Paul's Protestantism

having been smoothed over by a kindly dispensation — and the manufacture of sacred embroidery and the immortalisation of sky-scrapers went on under the same happy roof.

To have won Gabrielle had seemed marvellous, wonderful, but that moment of winning her, rapturous as it had been, what was it compared with this daily living by her side; to be allowed to spend one's days in the close neighbourhood of such fragrant goodness as Gabrielle's? For, as time went on, her goodness of nature grew to seem more wonderful to Paul even than her beauty. It seemed, indeed, that her beauty grew out of her goodness — was her goodness. Her goodness had the charm of a natural gift, and her religion, as Paul soon learned, as he studied her day by day — happy student! — was no less an unconscious fruition of her whole spontaneous being. She prayed — as she sang.

It often amazed him, as he watched her, to see how real certain beliefs and attitudes so figmentary for himself were to her instinctive, childlike nature, and how little ways of thought which in others he would have called either superstitious or insincere, were the true religion of a little, trusting child.

By a hundred engaging ways Gabrielle led Paul even to respect "superstitious practices" which in

others he would have described as pertaining to a Polynesian savage.

For example, little Gabrielle never took medicine without making the sign of the cross several times and saying one or two *Ave Marias*, and Paul had to hold her in his arms, too, and reassure her before she would set her lips to the bitter stuff.

“I don’t like it,” she would say.

“I know, little girl, it’s terrible. Only remember how much good it is going to do you.”

“I’m a brave girl, am I not, Paul?”

“Indeed, you are, Gabrielle. But, see now — see, it will soon be down, and then — ”

“What will you give me then, Paul?”

“You shall have a pound of your favourite chocolate.”

“Truly, Paul?”

“Truly.”

“Wait a minute, then!”

Gabrielle would thereupon mystically tattoo herself with prayers, and presently, “Now!” she would say, and the bitter stuff was swallowed at last.

I have no doubt that this sounds silly to read. Had it been anyone else but Gabrielle, Paul would have called it idiotic, but it was so plainly real to Gabrielle that he could not help respecting it, and wondering if that was not the only efficacious way of taking medicine.

Gabrielle, I said, but Paul's name for her was more and more *Doigts d'Or* — for what a task, O Golden-Fingers, is this over which you bend with so soft a light upon your face!

*Doigts d'Or!*

But, alas! For so short a time shall little Denis wear these fairy garments upon his frail limbs. Ah! little Denis, if only you had stayed a year or two longer, worn out your baby clothes, and set *Doigts d'Or* at work upon some larger sizes. If only you had stayed! But, alas! the days of Denis were hardly more than the days of a snow-drop, nay, hardly longer than a snowflake's was the life of little Denis. If only you had stayed longer, Denis — who knows!

We have been so occupied with Paul Channing's domestic affairs that we have almost forgotten that he was all the time an artist. He himself may well have seemed to forget that all-important fact — in the lives of artists, and, alas! in the lives of those who love them. How many women have forgotten, or failed to realise it, to their own sorrow! No artist is really at heart a human being — he belongs to the Undines, to those fairy tribes of the air and the water that mean no harm with their appealing simulation of humanity, but do so much. They literally "enter in" to the

human passions of their fellows — even undertake the human responsibilities! — with such a reality of interest — become, for instance, husbands and fathers with such picturesque sincerity. It is they who make the cradle-songs that break the heart, and the love-songs that make the cradles. To declare that they are without soul or heart seems preposterous when all the litanies and lyrics of life are plainly of their making. And yet — Well, let us return to Paul Channing, merely recalling once more that, though he was by this the happiest of husbands, he still remained the most dedicated of artists.

Without, of course, forgetting Gabrielle's beautiful face, his eyes had once more remembered his beautiful buildings, and, stimulated by that fire which love mysteriously brings to all the affairs of life, he made pictures of New York so amazingly beautiful that even New York itself at last became aware of them. People known as "magnates" began to buy his work, and great ladies swept in and out of his studio. In short, Paul Channing "arrived," became a vogue, and found himself caught up into the social life of the great capital. His worldly affairs prospered, but having none of that worldly ambition which is too often a humiliating weakness of the provincial artist, he never forgot the simplicity which had made him strong. For a

nature such as his the common temptations of life flaunt themselves in vain.

Properly speaking, life has only one danger for the true artist — the danger of beauty.

Paul Channing had loved and married the good beauty. He was now to meet the evil beauty.

Beauty breeds its monsters, its coloured poisons, its terrible flowers. Just as there are strangely spotted shapes of flower and fruit, subtly coloured, fantastically formed creatures of earth and air and water, wicked fancies of nature, whose fairness seems somehow sin, all evil enchantment and deadly sweetness, beauty that is all lure and snare, and the heart whereof is foulness and dust — so there are women like Delilah Marsh. "Del" Marsh was the name by which she was usually spoken of in the over-cultivated society of which she was, perhaps, the most poisonous flower. To her intimates she was Lamia, the snake-woman, with the strange red hair and the violet eyes and the skin white as a shroud. She was beautiful as some exquisite fungus in the decaying woods, and indeed she was the child of luxury and degenerate idleness. She was very rich, and learned in all the potent essences and distillations of art — in literature, in music, in painting. Her library was like a garden heavy with evil scent, and everywhere on her walls the soul was seen as the beautiful bond-slave of the senses.

Her life was a continuous quest of new emotions, or rather sensations. Her pampered nerves cried out for the new thrill, and Paul Channing's art gave her for a moment that priceless shock of novelty. She bought many of his pictures, and his goodness, his simple boyhood, fascinated her. His freshness came upon her like dew, and his virgin spirit stirred all her impulses of seduction. And, alas! for him, he fell before her as one stricken by some sweet-smelling narcotic. She drew him to her as a snake draws a bird.

O Gabrielle, with your beauty, white as the northern star, wholesome as a meadow of daisies! where are your songs, Gabrielle — those pure little songs that used to float up into the window? Have you forgotten your songs, Gabrielle, or have they lost their power? Alas! Gabrielle sings no more. She only pines and prays, and watches Paul's haunted face with a dying heart.

Alas! little Gabrielle, must you come like this to understand that you love one of those terrible lovers of beauty — an artist? He loves all beauty — your good beauty, Gabrielle — yes, he loves it still; but the evil beauty has now laid its spell upon him. God made him so. God help you and him, little Gabrielle! You cannot help him, Gabrielle. The poison must have its way with him, spread its devil's fire through his veins.

But who knows?— he may not die. Love him and love him, Gabrielle, and watch and pray, and maybe he will grow whole again, and come back to God and to you, and the old, clean dreams, with purged eyes and a heart made new. Watch and pray, Gabrielle. There are saints to help all us poor sinners, and there is the compassionate Mother of us all.

All true religion is instinctive — yes, superstitious, if you will. It is the profound organic recognition by one's whole multiplex nature of invisible standards for our visible lives, obedience to laws of right and wrong essentially as "unreasonable" as the unseen commands of gravitation. It is dumbly unargumentative, and relies in silence on the aid of those invisible powers, which it obeys without a question, as simply as it draws its breath. Those who follow the invisible law naturally rely upon the invisible guidance and protection. Gabrielle's goodness obeyed the laws of God as simply as her beauty obeyed the laws of nature. As she strove to live according to the will and the example of the Blessed Saints, you can hardly blame her if she relied, in times of difficulty, on their assistance. Her own particular saint was St. Anthony — of Padua: he who finds for us what we have lost. Little Gabrielle knew, I imagine, little of St. Anthony's personal, Paduan history. She

would, very likely, have been surprised to hear that he was so recent a saint, and have wondered what the poor people did who had lost things before he was born.

Gabrielle had lost — a heart; not quite lost it, perhaps, but was in danger of losing it. To whom should she go if not to St. Anthony? The Holy Mother was ready with illimitable pity when hope was quite gone by, and loss was an irretrievable fact. She alone could dry our tears and bind up our wounds, but St. Anthony — ah! he could bring us back what we had lost, all the more precious by its seeming theft.

There was a little New York church where St. Anthony stood day and night — far away, indeed, from Padua — stood ready to help any sad soul that cared to light up his kind face with the flame of a votive candle. Near by his shrine was a box divided into two parts. Both parts contained candles, and one part, being labelled “ten cents,” contained longer candles than the other part, which was labelled “five cents.” Candles are earthly offerings to heavenly beings, and, if they were to cost nothing, what would be the point of offering them? Surely the intercession of an invisible power is bought cheaply, even nominally, at such prices.

Gabrielle always bought five-cent candles, for

she was a good housewife, and knew that God does not wish us to spend more on prayers than we can afford. Her idea was that, had she given a million dollars for a candle, her prayer would have stood no better chance of being heard. Indeed, she would probably have maintained that — the poor candles come first. Such was her faith in God.

So, day by day she would go and tell St. Anthony of her sorrow, and beg him to give back to her the heart of the man she loved.

At first, when Paul had fallen under the spell, she had been just humanly jealous, as any other woman might have been, angry and vindictive; but the more she watched the face of Paul, and marked how kind, though haunted and withdrawn, his ways, the more she came to regard him as smitten with a sickness of the soul, literally a love-sickness. He was sick of an evil dream. She would nurse him — self-forgetful as any nurse. This fancy of his meant no more than some fever accidentally caught. Even though it should kill him, it would not mean that he did not love her, or disprove that she, of all women, was his wife.

For the time Paul had not only forgotten — or seemed to have forgotten — Gabrielle; his art languished, too. Like us all, he had but so much life to give — here or there. His pictures needed

his breath and his blood no less than he needed his breath and blood for himself. So when it happened that Lamia stole from him all the life he had, his pictures also began to die.

Critics began to ask what was the matter with Paul Channing's work. Its virility seemed to be fading out of it. It was growing perfunctory and phantom-like; and, indeed, properly speaking, Paul worked no more. He was incapable any longer of that tranced absorption of all his faculties in a healthy fury of work which had possessed him as he carried his sketch-book close to his heart to and fro on the New York ferry-boats. The clear electrical atmosphere of his passionate vision of a new beauty born in the West, a stern beauty of strong towers, lit by the rising sun of a mighty people, had been invaded by a perfumed miasma, and the stealing sweetness softened all his strength.

“I saw pale kings and princes too,  
Pale warriors — death-pale were they all;  
Who cried, ‘*La Belle Dame Sans Merci*  
Hath thee in thrall —’”

How often he said that over to himself, with a hopeless smile at his bondage!

“Yes,” he would add, “and to this day they are all kings and princes and warriors that are her victims, the strong men and the pure and the noble. O Lamia's tastes are delicate! The

honey she loves to steal is hived, like David's honey, in the hearts of the strong."

But though he might fight against the coils, the beautiful snake's eyes were too strong for him, and more and more they drew away his life.

Yes, his life—for suddenly, one day, with a white shock all through him, he realised that, literally, Lamia had done him a mortal hurt. As even strong men may die of heart-break, he felt that he too was dying from within, dying of some broken pride of his spirit, dying, as it were, of very shame for the violated idealism of his soul. There are fevers of the soul for which the body must die, and, by some mysterious intuition, it was suddenly whispered to Paul that before many months were past, he was going to die.

When the thought first came to him, he dismissed it as foolish. Fevered men have these fancies. But it recurred again and again, and, indeed, before long he became conscious of a certain physical failure in himself, a fading impulse and a lack of endurance. He was manifestly thinner, too, and he would sometimes quote laughingly to himself the lines of that Eastern poet he loved:

“So thin grow I with longing, and this ache  
That in the grave will now be ended soon,  
The folk at evening my pale body take  
For the new moon,  
Being like a thread of silver for your sake.”

He would even say them to Lamia, with that sad laugh in which there is no laughter, the sad laugh of the passing soul. And Lamia, who in her way loved him, would feel a little sorry for him, and wonder . . .

"Paul," she said, one evening, as they sat together among the books and pictures that gave out poison like night-blossoming plants, "are you sorry that you have loved me?"

"Yes," answered Paul.

"Sorry! Why? Why are you sorry?"

"Because, Del—I have never really loved you."

"Never loved me!" and she laughed the scornful, fatuous laugh of the conceited poison.

"No, Del, I have never loved you for one second. I have been your poor drugged and delirious slave. I have pressed your lips to mine as an opium smoker presses the little pipe to his lips, and dreams he is king of all the gardens of the sky. Have I loved you, Del? Yes, if the man loves the poison that steals his soul and saps his body, and melts his manhood like wax, all in exchange for a few painted wings of the butterflies of dreams. Loved you! Yes. I have loved you as men love poisoned honey, and opiates loaded with death, and all the foul sweetness of the pit of hell—but, like all such men, how gladly would I give back for ever all your spices and your songs for one drop

of dew glittering in some old, pure morning of my boyhood !”

“Dear Paul,” said Lamia, “dear Paul — your talk grows more picturesque than ever. How full of colour it is, as vivid . . .”

“As the flames of hell,” Paul interrupted her. “Don’t you know that dying men are the best talkers in the world? No dinner-table can match the death-beds of some men for brilliancy. Del, I am dying — dying of the poison that is you . . .”

“You are not very polite, Paul. Death-bed wit is usually more polished . . .”

“You wicked thing!” cried Paul, growing pale with anger, and rising to go on shaking limbs. “How wicked you are! You see me dying — yet you can jest like that. You wicked thing! . . .”

But Lamia stayed his going with a caress, and gave him a long, singing drink in a delicate Venetian glass, and ran her white, wicked fingers through his curls, a little damp with the fever that was in him, and soothed him, sang to him, and told him that it was he who was cruel, not she; that indeed she loved him; if he loved her, too, was it any fault of hers? — and if it really hurt him to love her, he should go away — yes, go away that very night, and see her no more. And, for answer, Paul, lying back on the settee, with eyes like grave-candles, drew her close to him,

and looked long into the poison-flower of her face.

“Sing to me, Del,” he said presently. “Sing me . . . ‘The Woman of Dreams.’”

Going to the piano, Del recited, rather than sang, to the accompaniment of a touched note here and there — recited well, for Lamia loved poetry and all beautiful things with a real love, and perhaps was no more intentionally evil than any other beautiful evil thing:

“I am she who comes back and comes back with the sound  
of the rain,

I am she who whispers and whispers hidden among the  
leaves ;

I am the sea and the wind, and the sigh of the summer grain,  
And the lonely reed am I that rocks and whimpers and  
grieves.

“I am the woman who came in the dawn and the dew of  
your days,

For when first awakened your eyes ’t was upon my face  
they fell ;

From your cradle you rose and walked the world in the  
hope of my face,

Seeking the woman of dreams, in heaven, in earth, and  
in hell.

“Yes ! I am the woman of dreams, the woman no man shall  
wed —

Would you mate with the rising moon, or the glimmer  
of stars upon streams ?

Or marry the mist on the mere, or the hopes in the heart  
of the dead ?

Then home to your hearth shall you bring me — me, the  
woman of dreams.

“ Have you seen a light on the hills you never shall touch  
with your hand?

Have you heard a voice in your sleep you never again  
shall hear?

Have you dreamed of a sea so blue, and O of so green a  
land,

Believed in a tale more true than the stories of eye and  
ear?

“ Have you dreamed of a gold and a silver more silver and  
more gold

Than men mine in the mountains, or deep dived for some  
dream

Pearl beyond reach of diver, at the spent end to hold

A drowning clutch of radiance, a sinking, circling gleam?

“ I was the gold, I the silver, the light on the hills, the pearl,  
The sound of the summer leaves was I, the sound was I  
of the rain,

The hope in your heart was I, your dream boy's dream of  
a girl,

Yea, the woman of dreams was I — that all men must  
love in vain.

“ Ah! never shall you be mine, beloved, nor ever can I be  
yours!

You are the kiss of the sun on the sea, I am the flying  
foam,

Ah! shall we live in a rainbow, love, so long as a rainbow  
endures,

For I am the woman of dreams, and the rainbow is my  
home? ”

When she had finished, Paul was silent for a long  
time. He was thinking of Gabrielle.

“ Yes,” he said presently, “ it is time I went back to my woman of dreams . . . ”

“ I thought I was your woman of dreams, Paul,” said Del, coming over to him and laying her hand on his hair.

Paul laughed scornfully.

“ You! . . . You, my woman of dreams! No, Del, men don't dream of women like you. Men dream of good women, faithful women, of noble comrades, and splendid mothers — not phantom women, poison women, like you . . . ”

“ Paul! ”

“ Yes, I'm rude, I know. One is always inclined to be rude when one is wretched, and to reproach others when one is most disgusted with one's self. Forgive me. I know you are not to blame. You, like us all, are only fulfilling the law of your nature. Poisons cannot help being poisons. It is for the sane man to keep away from them. Good-bye, Del. This is good-bye. I don't think we shall meet again.”

However, Paul and Lamia did meet again, for her snare was strong even when clearly seen to be a snare; but one afternoon, as Paul was returning home from a call upon his cruel enchantress, he happened to pass by the church where Gabrielle said her prayers, and there indeed she was mounting the steps just as he was passing. She had not

seen him. There was a look of intense loneliness about her little figure, a dwindled, hopeless look about her very frock, that smote his heart; and, unperceived of her, he followed into the church. Except for half-a-dozen shadows kneeling here and there in the dimness, the church was empty. It was very dark, and indeed was only illuminated by the light from two shrines at its far end. To one of these Gabrielle bent her steps, and having fixed and lit a candle on the great democratic candlestick, she knelt down near by and prayed . . .

Paul knew for whom and for what she was praying, and, as he watched her kneeling there, his evil dream fell from him. Rising from her knees, Gabrielle met his eyes and saw that her prayer was answered.

“ Gabrielle, will you forgive me? ” he said. “ It was all a foolish lie, a wicked dream. I have never loved anyone but you in all my life. I was enchanted, Gabrielle. I did not know. ”

Gabrielle’s face grew transparent with a look of terrible joy, and she fell almost fainting into Paul’s arms.

“ O but is it true? Paul, is it true? ”

“ It has been true all the time. Nothing else has ever been true. I have been sick, that is all. Now I am well. I think it was your prayers, Gabrielle. I heard them all the time. ”

Gabrielle turned involuntarily toward the saint who had brought her back the heart she had seemed to lose.

“Thank St. Anthony with me,” she said, “for it was he brought you back to me.” And Paul knelt by her side, and prayed with her; and then they went out into the street together with shining eyes.

And, indeed, unless certain kind heavenly powers do have our poor mortal hearts in their keeping, how shall one explain the complete oblivion of those months of fever that, now and immediately and for ever, blotted out for Paul the name of Delilah Marsh? The ancient king who bathed in the Eastern river did not rise out of the water more cleansed of the leprosy of his body than Paul rose from his knees that afternoon cleansed of the leprosy of his soul.

“And the cross?” said I, after a long silence.

“It was an heirloom,” answered my friend who bought and sold the dream-silver, “that had come down to Madame Chartier from a grandfather who was the bishop of some place or other in Northern France. It is a humble thing compared with a gold cross that once belonged to the same grandfather, which poor Gabrielle brought me one day, when . . .”

“When . . .” said I.

“When Paul Channing was very ill.”

“And she brought this . . .”

“Some weeks after he was dead, and she and her mother were going back home to Europe.”

“She has gone, then?” said I.

“Yes; and I bought all Channing’s pictures she could bear to part with. I hope some day to be able to send her quite a little surprise packet of money, the profit on all I could afford to give her at the moment.”

“Channing died, then?” said I.

“Yes.”

“But he never went back to Lamia?”

“I don’t believe he ever thought of her again,” answered my friend. “I became rather intimate with them all, from the time that his wife first brought in to me one of his pictures to sell. It struck me so much, and she herself so interested and charmed me, that I asked to call and see some more of his pictures . . . and so we got to be friends.

“He was a very great artist, and, as he lay there wasting away, it was wonderful to watch his face light up as he talked about his old love — not Lamia — but the beauty of New York; and to the last there was always a charcoal and a piece of board at his side, with which in a few firm strokes he could do more than most men with a month’s

hard work. And, strange as it may sound, though he was so ill, I never saw so much happiness as among those three people. Their love for one another was the most beautiful, most truly happy thing, I ever saw. The shadow of death seemed only to make it the more beautiful.”

“And Gabrielle?” said I.

“It was strange to see her. It was as though she were not losing him at all — only parting from him for a little time. She had come to have as sure a faith in his love as in God Himself, and his death was to her literally little more than as though he were to be divided from her by a long journey. But that they should meet again some day at the end of the journey, and be each other’s beyond the power of parting, she evidently no more doubted than she doubted that St. Anthony had brought back her husband’s heart to her that afternoon in the little church.”

“Your old silver is very sad,” I said to my friend after a while.

“Yes,” he answered, “it is filled with sighs.”

FRAGOLETTA



## FRAGOLETTA

**W**HEREVER Septimus Ledward travelled — and he travelled much, for the vicissitudes of life had filled his soul with an unrest that did not suffer him to remain very long in any one place — he carried with him a strangely beautiful little box of beaten copper, evidently very ancient, and secured by bands and locks almost grotesquely out of proportion to its size. This box he never allowed out of his sight, nor permitted even his faithful man-servant to touch it. On his journeys he himself carried it in a strong leather case made specially to hold it, which never left his side, day or night. Only two people in the world besides himself knew what the box contained. One was the highest officer in the English Customs, and the other was of no special account. One would be right in surmising that the box created no little curiosity in the customs houses of the many ports of entry and frontier stations, through which in his wandering life he was continually passing. But he had only to draw from his pocket a paper signed by that high

official aforesaid to cause the officer in charge to salute him with an almost religious deference, and to signify that after such a credential no examination of the mysterious box was necessary.

His friends, of whom he had many — for in his strange melancholy way he was busily and sometimes vividly social — were hardly less curious than the customs, and would often late at night, when the wine had loosened the bonds of discretion, ask him to reveal the secret of the strangely beautiful little box, that, however fleeting his visit to any particular place, had always some distinguished position in his rooms reserved for it.

He would answer them according to his mood. Sometimes an elfish mockery would take hold of him, and he would excite and pique their curiosity with mysterious suggestions and half-promises of confidence. At other times he would silence them with a dark fierce look, but hardly more fierce than sad, which set them to knocking out their pipes, drinking off what remained in their glasses, and remarking on the lateness of the hour. At other times he would indulge a certain poetic invention he possessed, and tease them with picturesque fancies — such as this, for example. The box, he would say, was filled to the lid with gold pieces . . . Ah! but listen . . . gold pieces stamped with the face of a wonderful dead woman.

No! she was not some ancient queen of Babylon. She was a beautiful woman, dead but a few years ago, a mysterious princess of some long-displaced dynasty, whose fancy it was to establish her own mintage. She was very rich, and was able to employ the greatest artists to design the coins, some of which were light as snow-flakes and fine as lace, some no larger than a pearl, and some mossy and embossed like antique medallions, all various with exuberant fancies, and all impressed with her beautiful face. The coins circulated only among her courtiers, and the great number of her secret subjects scattered in all parts of the world. Amongst them their value was greater than the value of any other general currency. "When she died," ended Ledward, "I obtained, at an enormous cost, from the master of the mint, the entire residue of her treasury — and, great as was the cost, each of the coins in that little box represents a power to purchase devotion and service in strange places such as any other coin a hundred times its value would fail to buy."

There was among Septimus Ledwar's friends, as often happens among one's friends, a man who was really his enemy. Yet a common interest in a dead woman had irresistibly drawn them together. They had loved the same woman, and she was

dead, but Septimus had won her love in return, and his friend had failed. The woman had been dead now many years, but neither of the men had been able to forget her. Neither of them would ever forget her till they died; and, as I said, out of this immortality of mutual remembrance, a curious sinister friendship had grown. Each longed to speak to some one of that beauty which all the rest of the world had forgotten, but each had no one to speak to but the man he at once hated and blessed for remembering it. Both were lonely men. Both had been born, and one of them still spent his days, in the same old country town. Septimus, as I have said, lived but a short time in any one place, but none the less the old rambling house in which he had been born was always in readiness for him, and it was not seldom that his wandering orbit brought him back there. And up till three years ago he had always had for a companion a beautiful child. But now the child came no more, for she was dead, — dead, though but twelve years old, — and her little starlit face, that had so strangely incarnated her mother's beauty, was gone like the wood-anemones of three years ago.

Septimus had loved his wife with one of those rare passions which throw a glory of immortality across the face of life, and her death had left him

stricken with that dangerous loneliness in which the characters even of the strongest men are apt to become the prey of all the evil spirits of despair. Nor did he entirely escape their influence, but, for the first four years after his wife's death, he had, like many men in his case, numbed the noble pain in him by those narcotising dissipations which may possibly belong to the merciful processes of time, but which in retrospect leave the soul sick and sorely ashamed.

From one poor pleasure to another he passed, drugging the anguish of his memory; and meanwhile, in the pure atmosphere of his country home, a little gold-headed girl had been growing out of babyhood, and her big violet eyes were filling her face with wonder, blossoming there as though they were flowers growing out of her mother's grave — her mother's own eyes come back again as the lost hyacinths of this year return to earth with the next spring.

Once from one of his long wanderings he returned to find the baby grown into quite a little maiden, and the sight of her smote his heart with a profound remorse. Suddenly it was brought home to him that while he had been going to and fro upon the wasting errands of despair, this little flower had been growing up here, as forgotten by him as a lily in the midst of a wood. He had come upon

her as she was playing alone in the old garden, singing gay little snatches to herself, as she wove daisy-heads into a chain upon her tiny lap. There was a curious pathetic loneliness about her gaiety, and as he watched her there, weaving her daisies and singing in the sun, there was suddenly flashed upon him a vision of the little creature's lonely days. All this while she had been growing "mid sun and shower," growing up and up like the other flowers in that neglected garden, going from change to change in the sweet processes of her baby-life. And he had missed it all, all this exquisite growth of a child, a girl-child — missed it, for what? Suddenly she looked up and saw him, and throwing down her daisies with a cry of delight, ran to him with heart-breaking eagerness.

"Why, Daddy," she cried, "I thought you were never coming home!"

"Fragoletta," he said, her mother looking up to him out of her eyes, "Fragoletta, I will never go away any more —" and he pressed the little figure to his heart.

"O Daddy," she said, "do you really mean it? Why, that is news! I must run and tell Nanny . . ." and she half started off to tell the great news to her nurse, one of those good women who are mother and father and playmates and the whole world to lonely children.

“No, stay awhile,” he said, gently restraining her, “show me the daisy chain you were making”; and they went and sat down under an old mulberry-tree together, and Fragoletta picked up her daisies, and began humming one of her little songs.

“Nurse has taught me so many new songs while you were away, Daddy,” she said. “Shall I sing you one?”

“Do, my darling,” he said, the arrows again in his heart, to think how good all this time a kind servant had been to his child. As she sang in her little bird-like treble, the tears filled the father’s eyes. With the quickness of childhood she noticed them: “Why, Daddy, you are crying . . .” and then a storm of sorrow swept over him against which he was powerless, and, burying his face in the baby lap, he sobbed as though his heart would break; and the mother that lives already even in little tiny girls stroked his hair, as if she knew all the sorrow of the world, and softly said over and over, “Don’t cry, Daddy dear, don’t cry.”

From that moment Septimus and his little daughter were inseparable companions. He still remained a wanderer, but henceforth she shared his wanderings, and it was his joy to take her with him to all the old beautiful places of the earth, the places made sacred by history and by art, and to watch the wonder of the world reflected in her

eager young eyes. And what a responsive, grateful little spirit it was! How she drank in all the beauty and the wonder with those big eyes — eyes so lit up from within that many who looked at her shook their heads! It was too much the face of a spirit to be long a visitant of this world — and then her mother had been only twenty-six when she died. Fragoletta! Darling little Fragoletta! The very name seemed ominous — and as she grew more and more into maidenhood, graceful as a wind-flower, her father often caught himself looking at her with a sinking of the heart. So terribly her mother born again — dare one think she would escape her mother's fate? She had come to seem less like his daughter than her mother's childhood, her mother as a little girl — like those pictures of her in short frocks which, like most lovers, he cherished perhaps best of any: for there is something strangely touching in those pictures of one's wife taken in childhood, with the funny little shoes and stockings and the nursery coiffure of the period. This wife, so tall, so much a woman at your side — was she really once a small school-girl like that? How strange!

So the days went by, Fragoletta growing each day in beauty and grace, and in his love for her Septimus found a consolation in which there was no unfaithfulness; but a consolation filled with the

menace of a new bereavement — or rather the old bereavement suffered twice; and when Fragoletta died it was to him as though her mother had died again. But, this time, he sought no more the tawdry alleviations of his first sorrow. He had lived too long and too near to the pure heart of a child; and it is one of the mysteries of the heart that the memory of his wife was now merged in the memory of his child. It was Fragoletta he found himself thinking of, and of her mother through her. So strange is the human heart!

And, along with the purification which little Fragoletta had wrought in him, there came to him, soon after she had died, one of those curious intuitions which one would disregard as fancies did they not so often vindicate themselves as facts — the intuition that before very long he too would follow whither Fragoletta and her mother had gone, and in some meadow of Paradise come once more upon his little girl making daisy chains and singing to herself in the sun. There was no reason at all for this feeling; for, in spite of all his sorrows, Septimus, as we have said, was no melancholy monomaniac, but an active man of this world. Still anyone versed in the subtle signs of approaching death might have noted a strange kindness stealing over him soon after little Fragoletta's death, a kindness hardly of this world, an aloof gentleness of

manner, as of one ceasing to concern himself with the sublunary turmoil, the manner of one who is taking farewell. As the days went by, his face grew gentler and gentler, till, though he was still quite a young man, it grew, like Fragoletta's, to seem made of starlight. And all the time, too, he continued wandering from place to place, though his wandering was no longer the restless fever of the past. He travelled now to see again the places Fragoletta and he had seen together, and often he felt certain within himself that he was seeing them for the last time.

And this kindness that was coming over him extended itself to all by whom he had suffered wrong, making him eager even to take the wrong upon himself, to put to sleep old enmities — unconsciously, was it? that he might depart in peace with all men. Above all, his heart went out towards the friend who hated him, and they would often sit together far into the night in the lonely old house talking of the dead woman they both loved. But, strange as it may sound, neither ever spoke of Fragoletta. Sometimes the two men would visit together the rooms which were still kept sacred to the dead woman — the little boudoir, with her work-basket, its reels and skeins just as she had left it, her small wainscoted writ-

ing-room looking into the old garden, with her pen as she last laid it down, and the book she had last been reading with its face turned down on the divan. All was just as she had left it, and the two men walked softly about the still rooms and said nothing — except perhaps sometimes, “She is gone, Septimus.”

“Yes! Geoffrey, she is gone.”

Now it must be told that, as the years went by, the sorrow in the heart of Geoffrey Wake — for whom there had been no Fragoletta — was slowly turning to madness in his lonely brain; and there were moments in those midnight watches with Septimus in which, though he appeared to be drowsily smoking his pipe, dark impulses rose up in his soul against Septimus seated on the other side of the hearth. Often he felt with fierce glee how good it would be to spring across and strangle the life out of the man who had robbed him of the woman he loved. His fingers would indeed move nervously at such times with the imagination of it. Yes! to strangle him, to watch him awhile in the stillness of his death, and then himself to die, and so end the ache of it all for ever. These dark feelings too were being constantly fed by indulgence in wine, which, instead of making glad his heart, filled it with gloom and desperate fancies.

Sometimes Septimus would gently stay his hand as it sought once more the midnight decanter, with a: "Don't, Geoffrey. I have tried it. It is no use." And, usually, Geoffrey would take the admonition in good part. But it chanced one night, when the wine was running more than usually wild in his head, that he answered Septimus with a flash of anger.

"It is well for you to talk," he cried, rising threateningly from his chair, "you who stole her from me . . ."

"Gently, Geoffrey, gently," said Septimus, striving to restrain him.

"Gently be d——d," cried the other; and, his eye suddenly falling on that little ancient box of beaten copper, concerning which he had always cherished jealous fancies, he continued: "Gently be d——d; tell me what you hide in that box yonder! By God, you shall, for I know well what it is . . ."

At this Septimus grew white and sprang to his feet.

"If you lay a finger on that box, I will kill you," he exclaimed.

"Ah! it is as I thought," said the other, mockingly. "It is her hair, her thick gold hair you keep in that box. You have stolen that from me too. You thief—to steal a woman's hair out of her coffin . . . open that box, I say, or by the heaven above us, I will break it open . . ."

“You are drunk, Geoffrey — and you are wrong too,” said Septimus, striving to keep his head. “Beatrice’s hair has long since turned to flowers. If you would cut a lock of her hair, go pluck the violets from her grave . . .”

“You lie — with your snivelling poetry,” cried Geoffrey; and he added, laughing a wild laugh, “you shall die too . . .”

Plucking a pistol from his pocket, he instantly fired it into Septimus’ breast. Septimus sank back. For a second his friend glared over him, and then the madness passed in sorrow, and Geoffrey supported him in his arms, laid him down upon the floor, and found pillows for his head.

“You have done me a great service, Geoffrey,” said the dying man. “I have long wanted to go . . . to her.”

“You shall not go alone,” cried Geoffrey, his jealousy returning at the thought that the dying man was indeed so soon to meet the woman he loved. “See! we go together” — and next moment a bullet tore through his brain, and the two men lay still together, and the secret of the little box was still kept.

An innocent secret it proved, indeed, when the day came for the mourners, and the will was read, and all the locked places of the life of Sep-

timus were opened. Septimus' life had often been in danger in out-of-the-way places, on account of that mysterious little box of beaten copper. Expert diamond thieves had plotted to waylay him, under the impression that it was filled with precious stones. Once in Sicily, brigands had held up a lumbering diligence, because he chanced to be travelling by it. They had been driven off, but, if instead they had murdered Septimus before his time, and broken open that little box, what would they have found? A tiny urn of alabaster, a little silken frock, a pair of child's shoes, a bundle of old letters, and this word engraved in gold upon the alabaster — *Fragoletta!*

THE WOMAN IN POSSESSION



## THE WOMAN IN POSSESSION

**I** DON'T know how you put up with it. If I were you I should tear his eyes out," exclaimed Ruth Darley's most intimate friend, as she entered Mrs. Darley's boudoir for a little visit one April afternoon.

"Why, what's the matter, dear?" asked Mrs. Darley, and then immediately understanding: "O you mean Francis . . . that's all right."

As Mrs. Martha Stenning had rung the bell, a smart automobile was standing at the door, and in the hall she had come upon Mr. Darley laughingly leaving the house with an exceedingly pretty and smart young woman. The two were obviously very much occupied with each other, and the spin they were about to take together was likely to be exceedingly cosy.

"Francis's latest inspiration girl, is that it?" said Ruth, her beautiful black eyes smiling serenely from a face that radiated a happiness secure as the fixed stars. "Don't upset yourself about her, dear Martha. Francis and I understand each other . . ."

“Who is she?” asked Martha, by no means placated.

“O she is a little actress playing at the Comedy. Did n't you think her charming? I'm afraid she is not much of an actress. She is one of those actresses, you know, who talk Maeterlinck and Pater — instead of acting; and poor dear Francis likes that, you know. A girl has only to be pretty and talk about the Mona Lisa, and Francis is lost . . .”

“The Mona Lisa at this time of day! I suppose the girl comes from the provinces. Dear heaven, how sick one is of the Mona Lisa! If I were a man I should prefer a woman with a courageous taste for Marie Corelli . . .”

“I believe that is one of the reasons why Francis loves me,” laughed Ruth, who, though the wife of a famous poet and dramatist, made no pretence of being “literary” or “artistic,” in the cant sense of those much abused words. She was enough of a reader to enjoy Balzac — and her husband's own writings, of which he truthfully averred she was the best critic — and that is quite enough “literature” for an author's wife. To Francis Darley's great comfort, his wife did not possess “the artistic temperament.” Two artistic temperaments in one house would be a menace to the neighbours. But Darley knew who it was that read his nature, and

understood every little law of his being, as no one else in the world knew and understood them; and, however his fancy, and even his tongue, might sometimes be carried away, his heart was safe in Ruth Darley's keeping, as Ruth well knew, and smiled accordingly.

"Yes! but how can you stand it?" said Martha, returning to the main theme. "Why! if Mark were to . . ."

"Mark is different."

"How different?"

"Mark is not a poet."

"Thank heaven, no!" ejaculated Martha.

"Francis," continued Ruth, smiling, "is a great poet. Mark is — a great husband! Now Francis, whatever you may think, is a good husband — but he is not exactly a great husband — not a born husband, so to say, as he is a born poet."

"I should like to know your definition of a good husband," rejoined Martha. "It must be rather original."

"A good husband is a man who needs you, and knows it — and does not forget it."

"And a great husband?" queried Martha.

"Is one who needs no one else."

"You are easily satisfied, Ruth," commented her friend, "and your definition is certainly not romantic. 'A man who needs you'! How prosaic

living with a poet has made you! I want to be loved — not to be needed.”

“To be needed *is* to be loved,” answered Ruth, sententiously. “Need is the only love that lasts, and the deeper the need the deeper the love. Men need all kind of things in woman. They need our beauty, and, should that go, and we possess nothing else they need, their love necessarily goes too. They also very much need the mother and nurse in us, and the wife that holds a man is hardly less of a mother to her husband than to her children. There is no baby to compare with a big, grown-up husband.”

“That is all very well, so long as he only needs *us*. It is his needing someone else as well that I object to . . . Why should Francis need to be gadding about with little actresses and such like, when he has a wife as young and pretty as you at home?”

“Because, as I said before, Francis is a poet.”

“I don’t see what difference that makes. Why should a poet be more polygamous than your average man?”

“I don’t believe he is,” said Ruth, stoutly, “but in his case you hear about it, and in the case of the average man you don’t. Your average man, for one thing, is more of a hypocrite, and, for another, less interesting to the gossips. Besides,

something comes of a poet's love-affairs — Heine's love-songs, for instance — whereas the love-affairs of your average man are mere hoggish self-indulgence."

"You were n't always so philosophical, Ruth."

"No," and Ruth's black eyes flashed for a moment with a certain memory, "because I did n't always know Francis as well as I do now. I admit that once it would have broken my heart to see him go off like this. I should have thought our love was at an end, and been ready for all kinds of jealous revenges. I nearly left him once on account of an affair really no more serious than this, and it was seeing how suddenly and completely it passed away that taught me my lesson. Afterwards I grew to feel quite sorry for the girl, as, living with him day by day, I noticed how completely and how unconsciously he had forgotten her. His power of forgetting, or rather of doing without people, sometimes frightens me. It is so quiet and absolute, so silently a part of him. He seems to care for people, not as individuals, but as sensations — for the effect they produce in him. They exist for him only so long as they produce the effect he desires. I don't think he is quite conscious of this, and, in fact, imagines himself a devoted friend to any number of people — but I think I'm right, and anyhow I know it's like that with what he calls his inspiration girls . . ."

“Inspiration girls indeed!” fumed Martha, by no means convinced by Ruth’s long speech; “why cannot he stay at home and get his inspiration from his wife?”

“For the same reason, dear Martha, that a painter needs a change of models occasionally . . .”

“Thank heaven I am not a painter’s wife,” interjected Martha, irrelevantly. “Think what the wives of those painters from the nude must suffer . . .”

“Martha, you are adorable,” laughed Ruth, kissing her friend, “but I’m glad you said that, because it helps me to explain poor Francis better. You know that those painters you speak of only look upon their models with a purely professional eye . . .”

“They say so — but does any one believe them?”

“No doubt there are exceptions,” said Ruth, smiling, “but in the main I think it’s true. I understand how it may be, through Francis — for, however much he may call himself in love with this or that inspiration girl, I notice that he is even more in love with the verses she inspires . . .”

“It is enough to make one give up reading poetry, when one thinks of the horrible processes of its production,” said Martha, with a shudder.

“Like *pâté de foie gras*, or *osprey plumes*, eh?” laughed Ruth, mischievously. “Well, if you love

poetry, and particularly if you love a poet, you have to overlook the process."

"I could never do it," said Martha, decisively.

"O yes! you could," said Ruth. "It is a part of her *métier de femme* for a wife to adapt herself to her husband's profession, whatever it may be. Besides, if Francis were to stop falling in love, we should starve. Without the stimulus of some new face, his brain would stagnate; for it is the novelty of the thing — not the thing itself — that makes the inspiration. Why now, come, Martha! in a lesser degree we all experience the same thing when we have a little flirtation with a new man at dinner. How bright we suddenly become, and we say a hundred clever things we should certainly never say at home, dumbly dining with the best of husbands. Daily life together strengthens the roots of love, and fills the branches with fruit, but it necessarily shakes down the blossom."

"Life cannot be all blossom," commented Martha, with solid wisdom.

"True enough, dear moralist, but you must have noticed that by the time the blossom has turned to fruit, the birds have stopped singing."

"You are incorrigible, Ruth. To think of you standing up for Francis in this way, and to think how he is spending his time this very minute . . ."

"Dear Francis!" said Ruth, half to herself, her

eyes growing soft with tenderness. "I think I know pretty well what he is doing, and could almost tell you what he is saying. Let's see — it's just half-past four. They've been gone about an hour. Yes! they'll be well into Surrey by this, and have probably stopped at some little country inn for tea. There is one I know of with a quaint old garden, winding box-hedges, and summer-houses in quiet corners. They will probably have tea brought out into one of these, as it is such a sunny afternoon. On the way along, they have almost certainly been discussing what is politely called the necessity of the artist to live his, or her, own life — with a gentle accent on the *her* (for she, you must remember, being an actress, is very much of an 'artist') — the necessity of the artist to live his or her own life untrammelled by conventions . . ."

"Without regard to common decency," amended Martha.

"Be quiet, Martha, and don't interrupt the clairvoyant. He has also been telling her, so as to give a respectable air to their flirtation, as well as to set her at her ease, what an angel I am, and how perfectly I understand his nature, and allow him his own way. She has said how exquisite she thinks me, and how she could n't bear that their — their — friendship should cause me a moment's

pain. These decent preliminaries agreed upon, they may now begin to play the game with a clear conscience . . .”

“Ruth, you are quite horrible . . .”

“Hush! they are sitting in one of the little arbors waiting for the tea, and he is leaning over the table looking into her eyes. They are both silent a long while. His hand rests on hers upon the table. Now he is speaking: ‘If only we had met earlier . . .’ he has said — without a quiver of a humorous muscle, perhaps sincerely forgetting that he has said exactly the same thing at least a thousand times before. She pats his hand deprecatingly. ‘You mustn’t say that,’ she says. ‘O it is no disloyalty to Ruth,’ he hastens to explain. ‘I love her very truly. But I love her differently. There are so many ways of loving. We love one for certain qualities, and another for other qualities. What I give you is not taken away from Ruth. The love I feel for you is something different — well, because it is for you . . .’ Here they suddenly unlock hands, and adopt a correct attitude of admiration of the rural prospect — for the tea-tray is approaching . . .”

“About time,” fairly snorts poor Martha. “Why, Ruth, how can you!”

“Don’t be so unsympathetic, Martha. See, she is pouring out the tea for them. ‘How many

lumps? Milk or cream?’ Her expression is almost domestic. It is so dear to be playing at home together—even in so timid a way. Neither speaks of this, but there is an implication of it in their manner toward each other. ‘Ah! well . . .’ sighs Francis, presently, with unutterable meaning. ‘We must be brave,’ says the girl, with wifely tenderness. ‘Yes! yes!’ says Francis, ‘but O the tragic complexity of our poor human lives! What tangled webs they are! How we miss each each other, or meet too late!’ ‘Never mind,’ says she, bravely, ‘it is something to have met at all—even like this.’ ‘Yes! it is something . . .’ and Francis again takes refuge in the unutterable. ‘Who gave you that ring?’ asks the girl, presently. ‘Ruth,’ says Francis, blushing apologetically. Tears suddenly glitter in those wonderful eyes. Francis presses close to console her, his face wearing an expression of the tenderest concern. It is terrible to see her suffer so. But how brave she is with her little handkerchief! ‘And now suppose we go for a walk. There are some charming woods close by—and then we can have dinner at the inn, and so back to town in the moonlight . . .’”

“And you call that being married!” cried Martha, with something like virtuous indignation at what she regarded as Ruth Darley’s levity.

"No! I call it being married — to a poet," laughed Ruth.

"But tell me," said Martha, after a while, "about that little inspiration girl that made your eyes flash so, a few minutes ago."

"It is all so past and gone — it is silly to recall it," answered Ruth.

"Never mind. I want to hear. Besides, a woman's past is always so much more interesting than her present."

"O all right, then," began Ruth.

"She was a dainty little thing, and had what poor Francis calls 'a certain strange charm' to which he is susceptible — I call it a certain clawish fascination, a kind of green-eyed, moon-struck prettiness, which, I have noticed, repels the sane, healthy man no less than it attracts those abnormal, half-diseased creatures we call 'artists.' She was like some nasty sweet flower growing out of a grave. I suppose you have n't noticed, Martha, but artists have a curious distaste for healthy women. Not only literary men, but the great painters, too, seem to have an objection to really beautiful women. As a rule, the greater the painter the homelier his women. It is very seldom you find a great painter painting a really pretty woman. They seem to resent having to allow nature any share in the beauty of their art.

“Still, I don’t deny that in her way this little girl was pretty; and she was very clever and ambitious, too, and could talk Francis’s artistic jargon to perfection, picking it up from him so cleverly as they went along, that poor Francis never suspected that she was little more than a skilful feminine phonograph. It did n’t take long to persuade him once more that here at last was the One Woman he had been waiting for. Francis still makes periodical discoveries of that One Woman — but I know him better now, and pay no attention to them. I understand, as you would say, that they are a part of the horrible processes of poetry. But then the type was new to me. Having been brought up among soldiers, I was naturally a little out of it with poets. Besides, I was n’t married then — and marriage makes a great difference, Martha; for marriage is one of those actions that speak louder than words. If a man has had the courage to marry us, we can afford to reward him with a little of his own way afterwards. Having paid us the compliment of so serious a fact, surely we may be a little lenient to his fancies. Francis, too, I am bound to say, was quite clever for once. As a rule, he is a miserable liar — the feeblest I know. But I’ll confess that in this case, for a long while, he took me in completely.

“So soon as, by an accident, I discovered that I

was not quite the only woman in the world, he promptly introduced me to the other, explaining, with the most convincing innocence of expression, that it was purely an artistic affinity, the sympathetic relationship of two fellow-craftsmen, nothing more. 'Do you never kiss her?' I asked. The very thought seemed to fill him with horror. 'Never!' he exclaimed; 'how can you ask me such a question? It is as unworthy of yourself as it is unfair to her!' And think, Martha, I believed him — believed it was merely a union of souls. That, of course, I did n't mind. And by the way, Martha, have you noticed that so long as a woman lacks physical attraction — or so long as we think she does — our minds are at ease? But alas! you can, never be sure what constitutes physical attraction with a poet. Only of one thing be sure — that whenever he speaks of the soul he means, well — the body. Well, as I say, Francis took me in completely, and this pretty 'friendship' went on right under my nose, without my having a suspicion of its real nature — till the day came when our engagement was formally announced to our friends . . ."

Ruth paused, her black eyes flashing once more with ancient memories.

"And then? . . ." prompted Martha, interested as only another married woman could be in such a story.

“ Well, an evening or two after our engagement had been announced, who should come to pay me a visit but our little inspiration girl, whom in the innocence of my heart I had grown to look on quite as a friend. It was part of Francis’s wicked scheme to disarm criticism by bringing us together occasionally, and she would sometimes come and take tea with me, and talk in a winning pathetic way she had, which would have taken in the devil himself. So her visit was no particular surprise. Indeed, poor soul, my first thought was that she had come to congratulate me on my engagement. So successfully had they fooled me . . . ”

“ The wretches ! ” ejaculated Martha, sympathetically.

“ ‘ It is sweet of you to come like this, Stella,’ I said in my innocence. She flushed slightly with a momentary embarrassment, but quickly recovered her self-possession — of which, as a rule, I may say, the expression ‘ triple brass ’ gives but a faint idea. ‘ Child ! ’ she said — she had an amusingly superior way of calling every one ‘ child ’ — men and women alike, particularly men — ‘ Child ! ’ — and she took both my hands, and looked one of her particularly sincere, soul-melting looks deep into my eyes — ‘ child ! I would give anything not to have to say what I have come to say to-night — anything to save you the pain of it. If it were

only for myself, I would never say it — but, by my love for my mother, which, as you know, is the most sacred thing in my life, I swear that I do it more for his sake than my own . . .’

“‘For his sake!’ said I. ‘What do you mean? Pray sit down and explain yourself.’

“‘I mean,’ she said, ‘that you must never marry Francis Darley . . .’

“‘Indeed,’ said I, ‘and would you mind explaining why not? . . .’

“‘Because he doesn’t really love you. He makes you believe so. But he does n’t really love you — as you deserve to be loved . . .’”

“She had the impudence to say that!” cried the sympathetic Martha.

“‘Go on,’ I said,” continued Ruth.

“‘Well,’ she explained, ‘he really loves me — but he has n’t the strength to tell you so himself . . .’

“I was so dumfounded, not so much by what she was saying as by the calm effrontery of her saying it, that I sat silent, just nodding to her to proceed.

“‘You see, child, you and he have been engaged a long time, and he feels in honour bound to you. And, of course, he loves you too, in a way . . .’

“‘Thank you . . .’ said I.

“‘O don’t be angry with me, Ruth. Am I hurting you?’

“‘Not in the least,’ said I; ‘I am interested — that’s all. Please go on.’

“‘Well, as I said, he is truly fond of you — but, well! there is — you must forgive me, Ruth, so much in him you don’t understand, don’t answer to . . .’

“‘It’s true I can’t rave over Pater,’ I said, ‘but go on . . .’

“‘Pater is perhaps a deeper bond than you imagine, Ruth,’ she went on with unruffled calmness; ‘but, of course, what I mean is more and deeper than that. In short, I know that I am the woman who, more than any woman he has ever known, meets him at every point of his nature . . .’

“‘Do you know how many women he has loved?’ I asked.

“‘O yes! he has spoken all out honestly to me. I understand his nature. They were but part of his development . . .’”

“‘Poor things!’ interrupted Martha.

“‘Leading up to you?’ I added with womanly sarcasm.

“‘I know it sounds conceited, Ruth — and, O child, *don’t* suffer — but I believe what you say is true. I do truly believe that ours is the true unity of the spirit. That sounds like cant, I know, but I

cannot help it — for of this I am as sure as of my life itself that I have never known any one who is so myself, who so embodies all that I really care for in this world. There is no need for him to assure me that we care for each other — because we are so like. He knows that and I know it, and a hundred times we say it to each other: “No one ever said that to me but you. I never dreamed any one felt this but I.” That absolute quality that I have always supposed means love is the love we both have — and nothing can take that away from me . . .’

“She stopped, and looked at me, expecting me to speak. At last I did.

“‘If Francis has made you believe all this, he is a better liar than I thought,’ I said, ‘and I am not proud of the part he has played.’

“‘You mean,’ said she, entirely unshaken in her confidence, ‘that he has been lying to me. It is impossible . . .’

“‘Not perhaps, deliberately,’ I said; ‘Francis would regard such deliberate lying as vulgar. Besides, there would be no amusement in it for him. No! he has undoubtedly meant what he said when he said it. If he has deceived you, he has deceived himself as well. If you know him, as you say you do, you must know what a creature of moods he is, how he is carried away by the

moment and the last new influence, and acts, or rather *talks*, accordingly . . .’

“But this had no effect whatever. She listened to me tolerantly, with a look of anguished pity, which is her own patent. ‘Indeed, I wish for your sake, child, that you were right. I know his moods, of course, and for a long while discounted what he said to me on account of them . . . but, see, I hate to do it,’ and she turned to a small hand-bag she had brought with her. ‘I have here some of his letters. Here is one of them. Will you read this . . .’”

“She had the vulgarity to bring you his letters! . . .” exclaimed the simple Martha, who likewise does not read Pater.

“She had — and the fiendish cruelty, too.”

“Never mind the cruelty — that was perhaps, after all, only the woman fighting for her life — but the vulgarity, Ruth — think of the vulgarity!”

“I’m afraid I forgot that at the moment. My heart was beating too cruelly from fear of what I was about to read . . .”

“And . . .” prompted Martha.

“Well, Francis had been a devil, and no mistake. If I had n’t loved him as I did —”

“But what was in the letter?” queried practical Martha.

“Just everything . . . No wonder the poor girl

felt confident of his love. She could hardly have felt anything else. 'Give me another,' I said; and she handed me another from an enormous bundle tied up with a corset lace.

"'Heavens!' I exclaimed, as I noted the size of the bundle. 'How often did he write to you?'

"'Once every day,' she answered, 'and sometimes twice, even three times.'

"'Another?' I asked, and again, 'Another?' till I had read about twenty. She handed them to me in a dead silence. I felt as though she were strangling me, and all the time I read she watched me with her cold, moon-lit eyes. At last I could bear no more of them.

"'Enough . . .' I said, and we both sat still, as it seemed for a long while. I confess that the letters had staggered me. Was she right, after all? I asked myself. Did he really love her best, and was he only marrying me, as she said, to keep his word? I took up the last letter, and read it again. It sounded terribly real, a simple *cri de cœur*, you would have said, if ever anything was written from the heart — which, by the way, Martha, living with a poet has long caused me to doubt. It was cruel reading, and it so shook my faith in Francis's love for me that I found myself clutching at a thought that began to form in my mind. Suppose it were true that Francis did in

his way love us both — equally, I forced myself to say. Suppose the scales were about even, and he hardly knew which of us to choose? Was n't Stella in this very act of showing me these letters unconsciously throwing something into my side of the scales which would outweigh her in Francis's mind once and for ever? For Francis, wayward as he is, and wicked as undoubtedly he had been, has a sound, kind heart, which nothing can alienate like deliberate cruelty, particularly when it is mean and small . . ."

"And vulgar . . ." Martha once more interposed.

"The more the thought grew, the more comfort it gave me. 'Perhaps, after all,' I said to myself, 'she has unconsciously done me a great service. For, unless I am entirely out of it in my reading of Francis, he cannot possibly go on caring for any one capable of this action of Stella's. It flashes too fierce a light into the mean recesses of her nature. If I am not very wrong, he will welcome this self-revelation of hers as a deliverance from an unsuspected evil — for I know that he has thought of her as the gentlest and most delicate-natured of women. Over and over again, he has spoken of her tenderness, her exquisite refinement . . . but now . . .'

"'Well?' said Stella, interrupting these reflec-

tions, which I imagine had been clearing my face of some of its first perplexity. At all events, they had helped to calm me, and when I answered I felt that I had regained command of myself.

“‘I think,’ I said, ‘that Francis has behaved most unworthily toward both of us, and in a way most unworthy of himself. After reading these letters, I cannot blame you for thinking as you say, and, if my faith in his love for me relied upon letters, I confess that these letters to you would have shattered it; but . . .’

“‘You still, then, believe in his love for you?’

“‘Strange as it may seem, I do.’

“‘Suppose I were to tell you . . .’

“‘Tell me anything — tell me all.’”

“And did she?” interrupted Martha once more.

“She did, indeed. It didn’t make so much difference as she expected — did n’t hurt me half so much as those letters; and, besides, it added greater strength to that growing feeling of security. What would Francis think of a woman who could so shamelessly reveal herself — for the poor end of vanquishing a rival? . . .”

“But what did you say?” prompted Martha.

“I said nothing for so long that she began to believe I was crushed, began to grow sorry for me . . . ‘Dear,’ she said . . .”

“The vixen!” murmured Martha.

“‘Dear, you must be brave. You will be brave, I know. Yes, be very brave. In the end it will all have helped you, I know it will, and, O child, let me try and help you — depend upon me to do all I can. Believe that no one in the wide world would give more to see you happy than I . . . It is not for myself I have spoken. It is for him. He has been so unhappy all his life, always seeking and never finding, and now that at last . . .’ Well, you can guess the rest, Martha.”

“And, again, what did you say?”

“Nothing. I just smiled at her, and let her go on — till at last she grew a little uneasy at my tranquillized expression, and stopped suddenly.

“‘Why do you smile?’ she asked. ‘Are you still sure of his love?’

“‘Yes!’ I answered.

“‘Will nothing convince you?’

“‘Nothing but his actions.’

“‘How do you mean?’

“‘I mean this,’ I said, speaking deliberately, ‘that I shall see Francis to-night, and tell him all you have told me. Perhaps you will lend me one of his letters?’

“‘With pleasure,’ she answered.

“‘I will tell him all you have told me — and then I will go away for six months . . .’

“‘And?’ she queried.

“‘Leave the field open to you.’

“‘And what do you expect from that?’ she retorted.

“‘I expect nothing. I shall just wait and see what happens. That is all. If you are right, and he really loves you best . . . he will have the opportunity of proving it. I shall exert no influence upon him whatsoever. I will not write to him, nor will I allow him to write to me. If six months is too short a time for the test, take a year. If I loved him less, I would say good-bye to him this moment. But I am a woman. I love him — and if he truly loves me . . . well, I will forgive him everything. I doubt if you could say the same. Reading Pater together is one thing, love is another. We shall see which he values more . . .’”

“Well, what happened next?” prompted Martha once more.

“I saw Francis that evening, and next day I packed myself off to Spain.”

“And Francis?”

“He has never seen or written to her since. He took her action just as I thought he would, and, indeed, felt his pride wounded because he had allowed himself to be infatuated by so essentially common a nature.”

“And at the end of the six months?” said Martha.

“We were married.”

“H'm!” said Martha, meditatively. “She had played her trump card — and lost.”

“And what had Francis to say for himself?” asked Martha, presently. “His part in the drama does not strike me as particularly pretty — however easily a too indulgent wife may overlook it . . .”

“His explanation was the most naïve thing you ever heard,” answered Ruth. “‘When a man is in love with two women at once,’ he said, ‘what can he do but lie to each of them — about the other?’

“‘You were in love, then?’ I said.

“‘Yes! in a way — in a way I have been a score of times, and shall probably be again . . .’

“‘When one is so often in love,’ I retorted, ‘don’t you think one should find some other description for one’s feeling?’

“‘Yes! but the feeling deserves a nice name,’ he answered. ‘It is not to be confused with . . .’

“‘Francis!’ I said, ‘I want no more of your talk about a union of souls. A kiss is a kiss — whatever the motive. You remember that Paolo and Francesca were *reading* together — that day they read no more. Probably they would have explained the situation to Lanciotto — as a common interest in Pater! . . .’

“‘Ruth,’ he said, taking me in his arms, ‘you are far too clever. There is no need for you to read Pater.’

“‘I am a woman who loves you,’ I said. ‘And love is a clever god. He is so clever that he has taught me to understand even you — taught me to understand that you do really love me best in spite of — the little kisses.’

“‘Never mind those,’ he said, ‘they only teach me to value yours the more. Shall I say a poem I made for you the other day?’

“‘You fraud,’ I laughed, ‘say it, of course, so long as you don’t expect me to believe it.’ And this is the poem! I have it by heart,” said Ruth.

“‘Through the many to the one —  
Oh, so many!  
Kissing all and missing none,  
Loving any.  
Would you know how sweet is love  
Monogamic?  
Try a year or two of love  
Polygamic!

“‘Would you know how dear is one,  
Leave the others;  
Loving all is loving none,  
True love smothers —  
Smothers all his heavenly flame,  
Kissing any —  
Loving much is not the same  
As loving many.’”

“Yes! he certainly is a fraud,” was Martha’s comment.

“You know nothing at all about him,” retorted Ruth.

“What happened to the girl?” asked Martha. “I confess I grow a little sorry for her.”

“You need n’t be,” said Ruth. “After all, Francis knows women. He could not have acted as he did, had he not known that it was out of his power to cause her any hurt. ‘Her little egoism makes her fire-proof,’ he used to say. ‘The egoism of the great is sensitive to the tiniest sting, but the egoism of the little is invulnerable. She will go on believing to the end of her life that I have never loved any woman but her; and that is all she cares about — for her love was just vanity. Do you think I failed to see that?’

“‘I’m not sure I like that, Francis,’ I said. ‘Can’t you do something to disillusion her?’

“‘I’m afraid I can do nothing, except what I am doing — and going to do for ever . . .’

“‘What’s that?’ said I.

“‘Love you,’ he answered — and, next morning, when by chance I had slept rather late, I found this little verse, twisted like a curl-paper in my hair. He called it ‘The Ghost.’

“‘Please, sweetheart, let her thin ghost rest —  
The devil take that tiresome Past!  
I loved you first, I love you last,  
And always have I loved you best.’”

“A poem seems to make up for a good deal,” said Martha.

“It does,” answered Ruth, “if you love the poet.”

Martha stayed for dinner, and the moon rose; and when ten o'clock came, she kissed Ruth with a certain curious respect, and went home. Martha was a very shrewd specialist of her sex. At first, and for a long while, she had suspected that Ruth was bravely making the best of it, as so many wives have to do; but the longer she talked with her the more she became convinced that Ruth was really a happy woman. She herself could not understand happiness on such conditions; but then — there are so many ways of being happy.

If she had seen Francis Darley's return home a few moments after her departure, she would have been still further corroborated in her reading of — to her — an uncommon situation.

There was not the smallest shadow of a question on Ruth's face as she welcomed her husband in from the moonlight.

“How you smell of the country,” she said, “the pines, and the broad commons! Did you have a good time, little boy?”

“Ruth,” he said, “do you know how I love you?”

“Of course, I do,” she answered, “otherwise do

you think I would let you run off with pretty, young actresses like that?"

"I'm so glad you used the plural," said Francis, laughing.

"Of course," she said, "my safety is in numbers."

"I want to say a little poem I made as I came along," said Francis, presently. "You'll never guess whom it is written to?"

"To me, of course," she said.

"Dear wife, there is no verse in all my songs  
But unto thee belongs,"

quoted Francis, laughingly. "But you're right — it is for you . . ."

"Go on," she said.

"Little mother," he said, seating himself at her knees by the fire, and looking up into her face, "I am so glad to be back home. Do you believe I love you?"

"Of course I do!" she answered. "You are only a little child, and you cannot live without your mother . . . But say your poem, like a good child." And Francis recited as follows:

"I did not know I loved you, love, like this:  
I thought our love was chance and passing need;  
Your eyes were very brown, and O your kiss  
Was sweet indeed —  
Yet dreamed I not of loving you like this.

“ You stole so unannounced into my life,  
No fatal premonitions or alarms  
Told me that you —well! that you were my wife;  
There were your arms —  
And unannounced I stole into your life.

“ Had someone asked me of you, I had said :  
‘ It is too late to meet her — long ago  
She is a dream, or maybe she is dead ;  
I do not know  
More to tell any of her,’ I had said.

“ And now, beloved, too well you know the rest —  
One woman must be heaven, and earth, and hell ;  
So soft, yet so responsible, a breast !  
I said ‘ Too well ’ —  
Love, is my head too heavy for your breast ? ”

“ You made that in your head as you came along? ” said Ruth, when he had finished.

“ No, in my heart.”

“ But she inspired it? ”

“ What if she did? You cannot surely object to an inspiration girl who inspires me with poems — to my wife? ”

“ Did you say it to her? ”

“ What do you think? ”

“ I believe you did.”

“ Believe me, I did not—but even suppose I did —I will admit that I am capable of reciting a new poem to a hack-driver, or a car-conductor, to anyone who happens to be present — even suppose

that I did recite it to her: what does that matter so long as it was written to you? ”

“ But she might think you meant it for her? ”

“ What if she did? ”

“ You are right,” said Ruth, “ what does it matter? . . . so long,” she added, “ as you are quite sure it was written for me . . . ”

And Francis was quite sure.

DEAR DEAD WOMEN



## DEAR DEAD WOMEN

**N**OT the sacred women who lie in their shrouds, pillowed upon their golden hair, but the living women who once loved us and love us no more — those are the really dead women. The women whose eyes are closed seem near and human in comparison with those horrible women who, though really dead, contrive to go on existing — or making a ghastly semblance of existence — without us. It makes one's flesh creep to think of them, and to meet them again is really to have seen a ghost.

I shall never forget the start it gave me, when, after seeing or hearing nothing of her for four years, I suddenly came upon Meriel — drinking champagne in a merry company. She had even the heartlessness to lift her glass to me, and smile! Horrible resurrection! Do the dead rise like that? I looked at her with something like fear, almost expecting her to fade away, a phantom of my disordered brain; but no! she persisted — persisted drinking champagne. Yes, surely it was Meriel.

How strange it was! Still Meriel, and still — drinking champagne.

And it was all gone then — all nothing to her — all that divine past of ours — ah! speak of it softly — all gone, all nothing to her! O Meriel, you *cannot* have forgotten. It was all so dear, so good, so true, so wonderful! O love, the stars and the dews of it, and the heavenly voices, and all the kindness, all the laughter. Oh, you *cannot* have forgotten. Or are you wicked now, and has time indeed turned the old dreams to derision?

Meriel, I cannot stay. I will not watch you there — drinking champagne; or will you come back, and drink it with me, drink it with me and no one else for ever!

So whirled my mad thoughts till I could support them no more, and I fled from those lit and laughing diners; but as I went, Meriel raised her glass again, and smiled.

Perhaps there is no gulf quite so impassable as that which divides us from the woman who loved us once, but who loves us no more; nor is there any woman so sternly inaccessible — to us — as she whom we once won — and then lost. Life has no stranger thing in it than this: that two people should be all the world to each other; that they should share all the sacredness, all the tenderness, of existence together, be closely united by a thou-

sand ties of loving intercourse, and that suddenly all this enchanted intimacy should pass away, as though indeed it were a mere trick of enchantment, to be replaced by an alienation so profound that no two people, however unacquainted, are now so far from each other as these two who were once so near.

It is surely the very strangest thing that anyone else in the world may approach Meriel but— I. I of all people! The very smallest amenity is denied me. Others may flirt with her, make her little presents, write her pretty letters, take her to see the play, be permitted to kiss her hand, and generally behave in a way that—if it were I, how well I can imagine the haughty “Sir!” that would transfix me with interjections, were I to attempt the most innocent of these liberties. Such divinity doth hedge a woman!

In the company of such reflections it is hard not to be cynical about human relationships, and if we escape cynicism, we must at least sorrowfully ask ourselves: What, then, is durable in human life, if this could pass away? On what shall a man build, if love like this can so pitiably, almost ludicrously, come to naught? Almost ludicrously—for such a bankruptcy throws a shadow of ridicule upon all human credit. What do human feelings and human vows amount to, if one day they can seem so

stable and so infinitely important, and the next day be so much east wind!

Yes! it is no mere egoism that prompts the pang with which we think of someone we have loved as happy and shining somewhere out there in the human infinitude — in spite of all that has been and can never be again. There is something in the feeling, too, of a fine impersonal jealousy for the memory of a beautiful thing. We resent this oblivion no little, as we resent the forgetfulness of some fair deed, or the neglect of some noble name. Our love is dead indeed — but let us not forget how lovely a thing it was in its life; let us think of it with that reverence due to all beautiful history; let us even sometimes scatter secret violets upon its grave, the violets of the Past and Gone.

I think we have too little reverence for our own histories, too little, indeed, of that attitude of mind which made young Sir Thomas Browne declare his life “a miracle of thirty years.” Busy, maybe, with the emotional present, we press on toward the new raptures, the new faces — forgetful of all that old treasure of the heart. It were well, I think, to give ourselves a little time to meditate on that. And for this it is good, on occasion, to be all alone — alone, say, in a great foreign city, lonely with a million lighted windows.

Such a loneliness is mine to-night, and, as from a watch-tower I mark the lamps of pleasure breaking into blossoms of gold in the twilight, and hear afar off the growing hum of dinner and theatre, and the fragrant rustle of a hundred thousand night-flowering women, I say to myself: I wonder for whom Miranda is dressing to-night — for whom is she coiling her splendid hair, crimson as a field of poppies, and just as full of sleep. I can see her so plainly. She is like a vivid poster on the walls of my heart. For whom is that radiance of expectancy in her blue eyes, that faint flush of excitement on her cheek, as she raises her white arms to her head, and thrusts in here and there the amber pins? Ah! that throat, those shoulders, Miranda, in the glass! They were mine once. Whose are they to-night? How blond they are, how abundant—like a field of wheat, with the sun on it, I once said; yes! wrote something like it in a poem—a poem Miranda has forgotten, at least to-night. I have forgotten it, too, but Miranda I have not forgotten. I hate the man she is dining with to-night, whoever he may be. I can see him calling for her, shingly groomed, and smiling fatuously with self-congratulation. He is so happy to be taking Miranda out to dinner. He is thinking that at last the long dry stalk of the day is about to blossom. He is thinking

that in a few moments Miranda will be seated by him in a hansom, a thrilling garden of fragrance and gauzy convolutions of silk and lace—

“Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south: blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out!”

She will take his hand and give him a long sweet look, and they will each heave a glad little sigh because they are together at last, and the man will say, “I am so happy,” and she will answer, “So am I.” And then they will be driven off to paradise.

Far from them indeed is the thought of the poor, lonely ghost that is I. And yet, Miranda, we used to think our little dinners wonderful occasions, too, if you remember; and you used to say that I . . . well, never mind—you have evidently forgotten it all, forgotten all the fun and the fairy-tale of it, and all the happy childishness. I must remember for both; so to-night, across three thousand miles of foam, I am thinking of you, Miranda. “I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion!”

Miranda has gone out to dinner, and I am once more alone looking out over the terrible city, lying beneath me like some monster with a million golden eyes. O the abysses of infinite solitude, the heights, the depths, that surround on every

side the tiny spark of one's being — and, perhaps deepest and darkest of all, the innermost abyss of the soul. I shiver, and turn from the window, but that abyss within my lonely room is lonelier still; and I am back at the window again — for there at least are lights and the human murmur.

And presently another face has come to join me in my solitude, as though a great white moth had floated up to me out of the night — a face of amethyst and silver, a shining, stricken face of tears and dreams, a face my heart dare hardly look upon because the face is still so dear. This face and I have shared so many sorrows together, have loved our love so well, yet has it slipped from our hands like a pearl that has fallen into the sea, and there is only the bitter sea left to us, and the lonely wind.

O did you think I was glad, Isabel, that our pearl had fallen into the sea — did you think that? Ah! come and look in my heart to-night.

Do you remember, Isabel, that evening we walked along the shining levels of sand by the Northern Sea — and there was still light enough for me to write a verse for you on the hard sand? We walked till the moon rose, and when we came back to read our verse by its light, lo! the rising tide was already washing it away. Do you remember that night?

Do you remember that other night when we

walked through the sweet-smelling Devon lanes again by the sea? Your face seemed made of starlight and your body of silver mist, as you floated, rather than walked, by my side; and I was half afraid of you — you looked so like a spirit, or a woman of faërie. Do you remember that night?

Do you remember that morning, when life had grown sadder, when we walked, again by the sea, in a mighty sunrise, and climbed great shoulders of down, and stood high up and looked across the glittering plains of water? We were sad, but as yet we had not lost our pearl. Do you remember that morning?

And now I can see the face of Isabel no more — for my tears.

To every man born of woman must have come such hours of lonely retrospect, when the evening sky has seemed like a frieze of unforgotten faces, and his aching heart has gone wandering among lost paradises. With what immortal treasure have the beauty and the goodness of women enriched our memories! They have indeed made of our lives “a miracle of thirty years” — perhaps a miracle of sixty! And, as out of the sweet-smelling treasure-chest we softly take the gifts of wonder they gave us, it will be strange if a sense of our own failure does not overcome us, of failure to ap-

preciate our fairy fortune till it was too late. We were so young, maybe, and so eager for all the beautiful faces that we took all too heedlessly the beautiful face that was our own, and did not value at its worth the gift that is seen to have been so infinitely precious — now that it has been taken back.

“One asked of Regret,  
And I made reply:  
To have held the bird,  
And let it fly;  
To have seen the star  
For a moment nigh,  
And lost it  
Through a slothful eye.”

Ah, how much better we could love those faces now, how much finer a return we could make for all that faith-of-heart we paid perhaps so cheaply in base coin, the mintage of vanity! If only we could be granted another trial! Life has been teaching us the values of things! If only we might apply our new wisdom to those old opportunities of happiness so eagerly offered to us! If only we could do all our loving over again! And if we could, would there not be more love and — fewer loves? In how different a spirit, with what gratitude and humility, would we accept the wonderful gift of woman! O how true we would be, how carefully we would tend our love — lest it

should die; how we would honour it and humour it, and engage it by a thousand devices — lest it should fly away! And with what attentive happiness would we taste and dwell upon each miraculous moment!

Ah, yes! we see it all so clearly now, as those beautiful faces, so heavenly kind, shine down upon us, “enskied and sainted,” from the lonely night. How good, how good they were to us — those beautiful women who loved us once and love us no more! Surely when one comes to die, a man’s last thought will be one of thanksgiving for the goodness of women to him all his days.

Yes! the goodness of women! We talk much of their beauty, but as one grows older, and begins to recover from one’s first heady draught of the intoxicant known as woman, it is, I think, woman’s goodness, rather than her beauty, that comes to seem her one astonishing characteristic. Her beauty, indeed, comes to take its place as merely one of the component elements of her goodness; and we grow to understand why, in the evolution of humanity, the Madonna has supplanted Aphrodite in the temples of the world. Yes! the homeliest Madonna ever painted comes to wear a beauty for our eyes such as the most provocative Aphrodite, in all the superb pomp of her physical perfection, can wear for us no more.

Woman shares her beauty with the whole of nature. She is but one small fraction of the beauty of the world, and, in a universe which from planet to animalcule is one long riot of beauty, to any eyes but those of a lover's illusion she is, by comparison, but indifferently fair. The true lovers of beauty, as distinct from mere lovers of women, know many a lovelier thing than woman.

There are creatures in the sea made out of rainbows of such fairy shape that by their side the most beautiful woman is ungainly as a hippopotamus, and the earth and air are clothed and winged with forms more exquisite than any girl that was ever made out of dew and danger. The beauty of some animals far surpasses the beauty of any woman, and the grace of the most graceful woman is clumsiness compared with the maddening mobility of some fishes. What eyes, however lustrous, can hold their own with certain precious stones, or what skin, however fine its texture, dare match itself against the ivory and bloom of certain flowers? Even a woman's hair is coarse compared with the swaying filaments of certain delicate sea-weeds and the stems of silken grasses.

And when we turn from nature to art, woman's hopeless inferiority in beauty to the beautiful work of the artist's dreaming hands is so obvious as to need no illustration. No woman was ever so beau-

tiful as the Parthenon; no woman was ever so beautiful as a Corot; no woman was ever so beautiful as some words.

Woman's beauty, I repeat, but represents her small share in the common stock of universal loveliness. The world is an inexhaustibly beautiful world. After life itself there is nothing so common as beauty. Beauty is the lavish by-product of the vital process. Without apparently giving beauty a thought, nature is heedlessly, wantonly beautiful; and she produces beautiful women as carelessly as she produces some exquisite weed, or litters the bottom of the sea with mother-of-pearl.

But woman's goodness — it is by virtue of that that she is unique in the creation. It is her goodness, not her beauty, that throws over her that hallowing light of the divine, and makes her something more than mortal in very deed; so that her deification by the Christian Church is less a symbolic transfiguration than a recognition of her actual every-day nature here and now upon the earth. The three attributes most god-like of all the attributes of gods are — Pity, Forgiveness, Consolation; and these are the attributes which make woman — Woman.

From first to last how much every man owes to woman for pity, forgiveness, and consolation; though it is not till he has lived awhile, and suf-

ferred and made suffer, that his indebtedness becomes by slow degrees revealed to him. Ah! as he looks back — how much has he been forgiven, from those early heedless days when he took the love of his mother as carelessly as his breath, and wounded her heart without dreaming of it, heaven knows how often — on and on, love after love idly accepted, maybe, as so much tribute, and tossed aside with scarce a thought of all that wasted treasure and all the pain! Mother, Wife, Nurse, and Saviour: from first to last, it was Woman that made us, and not we ourselves; and always to the end of our lives, as a child runs to its mother in its distress, so man goes to woman for his solace, and so the whole world of mankind brings its weariness and its tears to the feet of Our Lady of Consolation.

Yes, one can bear to think of the beauty of women, but the thought of the goodness of — some — women breaks one's heart.



THE HOUSEHOLD GODS



## THE HOUSEHOLD GODS

**M**RS. VEDA HAMILTON sat on the balcony of her beautiful country house on the Hudson and watched the sunset. She was alone to-night, and glad to be alone. Her husband was away in Washington on political business — Joseph Hamilton, one of the strongest men and noblest natures in American politics. Dinner was over, and her two children, a boy of seventeen and a girl of fifteen, had eagerly begged to be excused that they might watch the carpenters erecting the stage in the great hall for their amateur theatricals next week.

The sound of hammers and young voices came to Mrs. Hamilton, as she sat and watched the mellow purples and golds of the sumptuously dying day. Every stroke of the hammer and every happy young laugh smote her heart like the tolling of a bell.

That performance her children were so passionately anticipating — would she be there to see it? Would it, indeed, ever take place?

Mrs. Hamilton was a woman about forty, strik-

ingly brunette. Her thick black hair, her rich olive skin, and her majestic black eyes — “tropics and tragedy in solution,” a wit had said — seemed magnificently out of place, somehow, even in their luxurious surroundings. There was an untamed, unsatisfied romance about her. And yet she was a very happy woman. She had married the man of her choice — a man who was as good and charming a husband as he was a distinguished politician — and he was a true companion. All she had asked of life had been given her. Her home was a paradise of harmonies and satisfactions. Her children were clever and beautiful. She did all she pleased. Not a desire was unfulfilled, not an inclination unsatisfied. Mrs. Veda Hamilton was a happy married woman of the highest order.

In some such terms as these she would herself have described her life — at all events, a year ago; but a year ago this very night it had been revealed to her that, after all, something was lacking in her ordered, happy existence that had hitherto seemed so complete and satisfying.

Mogens Neergaard, the great Scandinavian violinist, brought her the news.

They had met at a musicale, in New York, and as soon as they had spoken to each other she knew what that something was — knew, with a heart that shuddered at the discovery — and yet strangely

sang — that her life could never seem complete — never even real — again.

Her life had contained every element but one — that element of wonder, of enchanted exaltation, which we call romance. It had been everything but a fairy tale. Yet not till Mogens Neergaard had come and touched her with his magic bow had she been conscious of the lack.

It was less the famous music than the man himself. The music was but a part of him, like his deep, laughing voice, or his sea-king's eyes; for Mogens Neergaard was not one of those hunchbacks of art whose divine faculty must house with deformity. He was more like those old troubadours who could fight as brilliantly as they could sing.

“Yea! one who wore his love like sword on thigh  
And kept not all his valour for his lute.”

His tall, athletic figure and his fine, erect head gave assurance of a man who was as strong as he was fearless. A rapid, irresistible lover, he was no effeminate or cowardly amorist, and his physical courage had been attested by several famous duels.

When he and Veda Hamilton had met in that New York drawing-room, their introduction was for each other a thrilling recognition — a divine meeting again, rather than a first acquaintance.

One of those mysterious understandings that instantly unite men and women who are destined to play a part in each other's history, immediately sprang up between them. It seemed strange that their hostess should be taking the trouble to introduce them. They knew each other so well.

A month later Veda Hamilton and Neergaard were sitting on the very balcony where she was now sitting, for Neergaard had come almost to make his home there for a while, and no one but himself knew that, at great expense, he had cancelled important engagements to stay there. For an artist Neergaard was a rich man; so he could afford to love like a millionaire.

"Fancy Mrs. Pottle thinking it necessary to introduce us!" laughed Neergaard, suddenly, after a slight pause in which they had sat watching the sunset on Veda Hamilton's veranda. "I remember so perfectly what you wore that day ten thousand years ago . . . or was it earlier? I think it was. Indeed, I cannot remember a time when we did n't know each other. Can you?"

"I cannot," answered Mrs. Hamilton, gaily. "I remember perfectly what you played — that is, if you really remember what I wore."

"Is it a challenge?"

"Yes."

“Well, I’ll tell you some day.”

“You’re a brave man.”

“Yes, I know — but why?”

“To think you could describe a woman’s dress — particularly one so much out of fashion.”

“Men make women’s dresses. Men are the great artists in women’s dresses, as they are in every other form of art. It is their fancy and skill that make — some — women what they are.”

“They may make our dresses — some men, but no true man can describe a woman’s dress. I stick to my point.”

“There is a kind of man who can,” said Neergaard, audaciously smiling an unspoken word.

“He least of all.”

“You mean —”

“I mean, to save you the anguish of committing an indiscretion, that love is particularly blind in this matter.”

“You said the word first, remember,” laughed Neergaard.

“What word?”

“Love.”

“I said it to prevent your saying it.”

“I will never say it.”

“You must never say it.”

“No; but some day I will come in a chariot of fire and carry you away where no eyes but mine

shall see you, where I shall be jealous only of the sun and the stars — not forgetting the moon," added Neergaard, with one of those aside laughs that made no woman ever quite sure of him.

"I am not a Sabine, remember, but an American — an American matron."

"Well, in an automobile, then."

"I think I should prefer a naphtha launch."

"You would? All right. A naphtha launch — with a chariot of fire waiting — where shall I say?"

"Where do you think?"

"Anywhere this side of heaven."

"A nice, indefinite rendezvous. You artists are so impractical."

"That is a common mistake about us, which, on the whole, we prefer to encourage. And am I nothing more to you than an artist? Please think of me as a man."

"Much more."

"More than a man?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean a god?" asked Neergaard, returning to his irony.

"No — Mogens Neergaard."

"Is that your answer?"

"Did you miss it?"

"I did n't. How could I? . . . Truly I remem-

ber the dress you wore ten thousand years ago," said Neergaard, presently.

"Tell me."

And Neergaard described it.

"And I remember the piece you played."

"Tell me."

"Play it again."

And Neergaard played it.

In that hour there began a communion between Veda Hamilton and Mogens Neergaard for which, in the world's coarse dictionary, there is no name. Was it love? Was Neergaard Mrs. Hamilton's "lover"? Surely not, as the world understands those words. Veda Hamilton remained no less true a wife and mother for her friendship with Neergaard. And Neergaard, without a suspicion of treachery, had still the right to take the hand of Joseph Hamilton and look frankly into his eyes. Nothing that had ever been Joseph Hamilton's, or could be his for ever, had been violated or even jeopardised. It was only the quality in his wife which had never been and could never be his that had been given to Neergaard. It was no vulgar thief of the heart's treasure who had come to mean so much to his wife, and was his own dearest friend. Indeed, something had been given to him rather than taken away by the companion-

ship of the two; for through it a whole unsunned garden in his wife's nature broke into blossom.

She had been like a palace the most wonderful rooms of which none till now had cared to inhabit. Surely there was no wrong in Neergaard dwelling in those disused chambers of imagery. Till he came to the palace no one else had knocked at those unsuspected doors. And how wonderful it was to have someone living in those forgotten rooms!

No doubt the world, which occasionally caught glimpses of Mrs. Hamilton and Neergaard together, had its own crude misinterpretations. The world knows only one way of loving. But, indeed, Mogens Neergaard and Veda Hamilton dwelt in "breathless bowers" it "dreamed not of," and it is worth pondering how so good and beautiful a thing as their friendship was and can be so hopelessly misconstrued by a vulgar, concupiscent world — a world whose standards of love are the standards of the divorce court. Neergaard, it must be said, in explanation of such gossip, was somewhat famous for his affairs of love and honour. Mrs. Hamilton might well, maybe, figure as one more moth drawn by his fatal dazzle; but how positively laughable the mistake was! The two people most concerned enjoyed together the few echoes of such talk that reached them.

"Has he kissed you yet?" asked an old woman friend of Mrs. Hamilton, worldly to her finger-tips. She was a woman not easily frightened, but the blazing silence of Mrs. Hamilton's reply perceptibly shortened her call.

"The fools! the idiots! the pigs!" Neergaard stormed, when he heard the story. "Kiss you! Heavens! Who wants to *kiss* you?"

Both of them broke into laughter at his vehemence. Certainly it was not the customary talk of a lover.

"Kiss you!" he went on, fuming to himself. "What a word! Kiss you!" And then he burst forth into one of his torrents of breathless rage. "Why, Veda, when I want to kiss you, do you think I'll do it behind the door? No! I'll just take you and set you high up on yonder star, and kiss you in front of all the universe. O these little sneak thieves of love! This petty larceny of the Seventh Commandment! Tell me, Veda—" and he stopped short in his fierce walk to and fro, and took her sternly by the wrists—"tell me, Veda, in all our hours together, have I ever seemed for a moment to be thinking, to have it in me to be thinking, of their miserable little love—their kisses, their caresses, their sickly little sugar-plums? Ugh! The fools, the idiots, the pigs, the school-girls! O but I'll kiss you some day," he turned

off, with savage inconsequence, "and the whole world will know of it, but they won't call it 'kissing.' It will be thunder and lightning and tempest and rainbows — and the fools will look up in terror, and say, 'It thunders,' or 'It lightens,' knowing nothing of what the gods are really doing. Kiss you! Do you see the tip of the young moon over there?" — his mood returning once more to fancy and laughter. "Well, some day you and I will sit and dangle our heels up there, just at the very end, and laugh at the whole stupid world, and kiss — yes! kiss if we care about it — just as often as we please."

"Little child," said Veda Hamilton, soothingly, stroking his fine, strong hands. "What a child a great big man really is, after all! What a child!"

The stars were coming out overhead, fields upon fields of marguerites.

Neergaard turned gently to his friend, his wild mood subsiding.

"Little mother," he said tenderly.

How good indeed Mogens Neergaard and Veda Hamilton had been and were for each other, one could hardly expect a wicked world to understand.

Most people not entirely animal, vegetable, or mineral, whatever the comfort or security of their lives, are haunted by an ideal — one might almost

call it an ideal of excitement—that no worldly prosperity can appease and no respectable occupation lull. There is some music of joy that life has never yet struck out of them. That flowering of existence we call romance has never come to them. Their lives have been brick-and-mortar. They have missed the moonshine. Those magic casements of which Keats tells have never opened for them. Nothing they have ever done has had the delight for them of something they ought not to do. They have the peace and the pence, but the music went down the other street. Such are not always consciously disappointed. Sometimes there is needed someone to come and remind them of what they really care for, and what—if they are not quick—they will surely miss.

Veda Hamilton's was such a nature. She was like a musical instrument unconscious of itself. She was ignorant of her own music till Mogens Neergaard came and with the mere sound of his voice set all the keys a-trembling. Perhaps he had discovered nothing in her except her unused capacities for being happy. How happy he made her, and by what simple means! She had only to see him. He had only to come and sit by her and say that he had managed to catch the 5.30 train. He had only to ask her husband what his opinion was as to the chances of a certain measure. He had only to

say: "It is rather warm to-night; may I open this window?" or "Lloyd, how are you getting on with Dumas?" to fill her with a new sense of wonder and joy. In short, he had only to exist in her presence to make her realise what music upon music of happiness had lain unawakened in her all these years.

Till she had met him she had never dreamed how one's very body can sing for joy — merely because another human being is talking politics to your husband over his coffee. True, she had always been very happy — that is, very comfortable and contented in her life. The difference between her life as it had been and as it was now was just the difference between affection and ecstasy. Not till Neergaard came had she known transfiguration; and till our lives have been transfigured we do not really live at all.

Neergaard was for her the spiritual vision that she had found nowhere else — not in religion, not in her home life, beautiful and dear to her as it was; not in nature, not in art; only in Mogens Neergaard.

And for him, in a different way, she was the same revelation. The career of an artist is beset by nothing so much as facile love, but the danger of an artist meeting the one stern, true love is that she usually breaks his heart.

Mogens Neergaard had seemed to know love many times. He had been a notable polytheist of the affections. But now, as he looked back, it seemed to him that all these various loves, charming and beautiful as they had always been, had been wrong ways of loving, meant to teach him the right way of loving, the only way — the love of one man for one woman, and of one woman for one man, as long as life lasts. His polygamic training had seemed to reveal to him the divine beauty of monogamy. And thus, for that very reason, he was able to bring to the woman before whose face all his memories perished like wax, a love pure and undefiled, a love the earth of which had been purged away, a love to which all other loves had been contributory processes. At last, free of its earth and its roots and its stem and its rough sheath — at last love was for him all flower.

So it was for these two people for many months, but at length there came to them the day that will always come — the day when they said to each other: "It is not enough. These few hours are not enough. Better none at all than these margins and remnants of another's days. All the days are rightly ours — ours by right of our love. We cannot live any longer apart from each other."

It was a summer afternoon, and they stood together knee-deep in a field of marguerites, secluded within the vast seclusion of a June sky.

"I cannot live without you," said Neergaard, as they stood looking into each other's eyes as in a trance.

"I cannot live without you," Veda Hamilton answered, the words falling from her lips without her knowledge.

Then, all in a dream, they were in each other's arms, and they kissed each other for the first and only time.

After the manner of lovers, they gathered each a marguerite and walked slowly from the meadow with happy, sacred eyes.

There, in a moment of exaltation, to which the high heaven was accomplice, they had made that solemn gift to each other which may not be taken back. For a brief moment they had lived in their own world, without thought of any other. They returned to that other as they stepped out on to the dusty highroad—the beaten track of daily life. Then they began to reason, after the manner of this world. In the meadows, among the marguerites, there had seemed no need of reason. On the highroad it was different.

And this reasoning was much like the reasoning of all lovers under like conditions.

"After all, it will be best," Neergaard was saying, "best in the end for him, too" — though he did not explain his second remark; and Mrs. Hamilton made no reply, walking at his side, thinking and thinking.

"Surely the happiness of two is worth more than the happiness of one," he continued presently.

"O but the pain — his pain," she moaned.

"What of our pain — your pain — my pain?"

"Yes, I know — I know —"

"Has our happiness no rights too?"

"Don't talk, Mogens. I am yours. It is terrible — terrible — but I am yours — now — always — when you will."

"Are you frightened?"

"Yes."

"Would you go back?"

"No."

"I love you."

"I love you."

So at length there had come for Veda Hamilton and Mogens Neergaard love's inevitable hour, when they must either part for ever or meet for ever. They had promised to meet for ever. The greater marriage, they said to each other, had annulled the lesser marriage. They discussed many plans. Neergaard was for going to Hamil-

ton with the simple truth. It was a man's way. Surely it had been the best way — the only way. But the woman shrank from it. There is always a coward somewhere in the bravest, and Veda Hamilton's cowardice was her dread of seeing another's pain. She could not face the thought of seeing her husband's anguish, seeing his life go down, like a shot man, before Neergaard's story.

If Neergaard really wanted her he must steal her — literally carry her away by main force in that chariot of fire of which he had long ago laughingly spoken. She would not resist. It was not Neergaard's way, and the man in him shrank from a course so like that of the common household thief. Yet it was the only way. He must either lose the woman he loved for ever or be held for what he was not. After all, when he and she were once together, what would the understanding of a world that necessarily misunderstood most things mean to them?

The world cannot take away anything from those for whom its gifts are of no value. To lose the good report of the world — and win Veda Hamilton! That was the proposition. Could there be more than one decision to that! The grounds of Mrs. Hamilton's home sloped through gardens and orchards and a brief stretch of natural woodland down to the Hudson itself, where in

a miniature bay was a hidden pier. At midnight a small launch would push its way through the branches and moor itself there; and Neergaard would stride up through the woodlands and the orchards and the gardens to carry away his bride.

It was for this reason that Veda Hamilton sat on the balcony watching the sunset, and wondering if this was really her last night in her home.

So she sat on and sat on, till twilight had become moonlight. Her children came and kissed her good-night. The carpenters had gone home. The Hudson shivered into silver ripples. The real world was put away for the night. The unreal world was coming on duty. The shadows were taking their places. The lights had already come out — gold dots and green dots, and red full stops on the darkening page of the world. Sounds that had no meaning in the sunshine became strangely significant. Dogs barked differently. Little flying things that had waited all day, afraid lest they should be seen, whizzed and squeaked, and were variously happy at their ease. The great silence yawned itself awake, with deep breathing, distant sounds.

It was the hour when the chair you sit on is all that is left of the solid earth — as if the tide

of oblivion had suddenly come up and washed the daylight world away, and left you there alone on your little rock of silence in the star-whispering night.

“O God!” sighed Mrs. Hamilton.

“Which god?” said a little voice out of the darkness. “Please, ma’am,” it went on, “I am only one of the humblest of the gods—one of the pantry-gods, so to say; learned people called us the Penates. I am the god that helps to cook the supper that Mr. Hamilton so enjoys when he comes home late from a long day.”

“And I, please, ma’am,” said another voice out of the shadow, “am Domiduca, the god that watches over his safe coming home.”

“Is he not safe?” asked Mrs. Hamilton, in alarm.

“O yes, madam; he has just left Washington by the Congressional Limited.”

Mrs. Hamilton turned in the direction of the voices, but the dusk had grown so deep that she could see no one. Yet none the less she was aware that the door behind her was thronged with appealing, familiar presences.

Soon another voice spoke, quite near to her.

“I am the goddess that watches over the fruit trees,” it said. “I am Pomona of the Orchards. I bring the apple blossom and the pear blossom

and the cherry bloom. I guard the peaches and the nectarines on the warm wall, and I scare the birds from the strawberry beds."

"I bring the snowdrops and the early violets," said another voice, "and keep the grass thick and cool through the hottest days. The dew and the shadows also are in my care."

"I am the god of the stables and the barns," said another voice. "I watch over the mare in foal, and make sweet the milk in the udder. I dwell in cool dairies and sweet-smelling granaries. I am the genius of the farm."

"I am the guardian of the linen closets," said another voice. "I scatter lavender among the cool, white sheets, and destroy the moth with the pungent odour of camphor."

"I am he who takes care of the pictures and relics of those you have loved," said another voice; "the sacred things that but for me would gather dust in unvisited cupboards and unopened drawers."

"I am she," said another voice, "who guards for you the first baby clothes, the first tiny socks and slippers, and all the firstlings of motherhood."

"I am the god of the dogs and cats," said another voice.

"And I watch over the poultry and keep the new-laid eggs from the rats and the young chickens from the hawk," said another voice.

“I am the god,” suddenly broke in another voice, stern and masterful, “that guards your husband’s honour.”

“I am the memory of your father and mother,” said another.

“I am the future of your children,” said another.

And while they were all speaking — these and many other gods of the home — the clock slowly struck the hour of twelve.

Then it seemed to her that, without her own will, she had risen from her chair, the persuasion of many little hands upon her skirts and the grip of one stern hand upon her wrist.

“Come indoors! Come indoors!” voices all around her seemed to be calling. “There is danger out here. Come indoors.”

Then she found herself in her bedroom, sitting near the window, with a stunned sense of loss — loss wide as, O far wider than, the world.

Presently there stole to her ears the far sound of a violin. It was Neergaard playing as he came up through the gardens.

Nearer and nearer the music came, till at last it stopped, as in angry surprise, beneath her window. She could hear Neergaard’s impatient tread on the balcony. She heard him walk to the door and try it. But the stern god that had taken her by the wrist held her still more firmly.

Then suddenly he was calling her once more with his violin.

At first the strings were all entreaty, wistful and tender; but, as he played on, they grew stormy with passion and angry with reproach.

He no longer pleaded; he demanded her in the name of his love.

The great god was calling her outside, but the little gods inside, the little gods of the home, held her fast.

At last she could bear it no more. Stiffly she rose from her chair, and called strangely to him through the window.

“Good-bye, Mogens,” she called; “it cannot be.”

Then the music ceased.

And the little gods laughed low and nudged each other, and pattered back to their cupboards through the silent house.

But the heart of the great god was broken.



## THE TWO GHOSTS



## THE TWO GHOSTS

**T**WO people who had once loved — or thought they loved — had been dead and buried for three years — that is, to each other. To the rest of the world they seemed vigorously and even gaily above ground, and, at all events, had retained sufficient life in them to get engaged to be married to two other people. The man, it should be explained, was already engaged when he first met the woman, and had never, during the whole course of his relations with her, the smallest intention of breaking his engagement. But the woman did not know that — and there is, of course, no possible justification for his wicked, Don-Juan-like attitude, except that, as boys will be boys, men will be men.

Now it chanced one spring afternoon, when these three years had gone by, that the ghosts of these two lovers met in a New York drawing-room, and were both very much disturbed at the sight of each other. Nothing upsets a ghost so much as the apparition of another ghost. Though they were both clever ghosts, they were unable to con-

ceal from each other their excitement at meeting, and, indeed, less able to conceal it from the eyes of the lookers on, who, knowing something of their story when they had been alive, were hardly less excited than themselves.

“The two ghosts have met,” went a whisper round the room; “what is going to happen!”

Meanwhile, the two ghosts were looking at each other without saying a word. Presently “Is it you?” “Is it you?” they said together, and each answered, “It is I.”

“Let us draw away from the others, and look at each other,” said the two ghosts, and they found a corner apart from the inquisitive eyes, and looked and looked at each other, and never said a word; till at last the time came when the woman-ghost must go and meet the man to whom she was engaged up there in the real world, and with whom she dined every evening — as, it is well known, is the custom of all engaged couples!

“This cannot be our last meeting,” said the two ghosts, “there is so much to say.”

“I will meet you in the same dear spot at three to-morrow,” said the woman-ghost, and thereupon she vanished; and the man-ghost smiled.

The same dear spot was a certain café full of quiet corners, where in the days when they were alive the two ghosts had been wont to drink through

straws to the eternity of their love for each other.

Remembering each other's habits, both ghosts were late, the man half an hour, the woman forty minutes.

"What shall we drink?" said the man-ghost.

"You know," answered the woman-ghost.

The waiter, who was an old friend, was quite startled to see them.

"Why, I thought you were dead!" he exclaimed.

"We have been," said the woman-ghost, looking fondly at the man-ghost, and surreptitiously pressing his hand.

The waiter did n't, of course, understand; so, to relieve his embarrassment, — with that extraordinary memory for the tastes of their customers which good waiters possess; "Shall I bring you the same as in the old days?" he asked with a fatherly smile on their re-arisen happiness.

"Do you really remember?" asked the woman-ghost.

"You shall see, miss," answered the waiter, and presently returned with the same sacramental drink he had made for them so often three years ago.

"Fancy your remembering — how dear of you, John!" said the woman-ghost. "Why, I believe, he is quite happy to see us again," she added, when he had left them alone.

“The whole world is happy with us,” said the man-ghost, “the very cars outside seem to be singing a happy song. And they have sounded so lonely for ever so long — such a sad lost moaning they made. Do you remember our old spring song:

“O the gay gay people  
Out in the sun, in the sun,  
For to-day the winter is ended,  
To-day the spring is begun;  
And the open cars are running,  
And the brooks are running too,  
And there’s a bird, dear, singing,  
Singing — all of you.”

“I love you,” said the woman-ghost, laying her hand on his.

“How dear of you to say it first again — as you did long ago,” laughed the man-ghost, perhaps a little ambiguously.

Then they took up their straws.

“Whom are we to drink to?” asked the man-ghost.

“Us!” answered the woman-ghost.

“Us!” said the man-ghost.

And then, with their eyes upon each other, they drank through the straws.

They had a very great deal to say to each other, many things out of the past to explain, many old misunderstandings to discuss. They had, despite

their great love, lied no little to each other in the old days — the man, perforce, because, as I have said, he loved another woman too, and loved her most; the woman, for no particular reason except that she was *intriguante* by nature, and could n't help it. Each had found the other out — the man the woman's little mean lies, the woman the man's great big lies. And so they had become ghosts to each other. Yet they had both cared a great deal, both had suffered, and both were happy to forget each other's faults for the purpose of spending a few hours together in a fool's-paradise.

“ Ah! but I have changed so much since then! ” said the woman-ghost. “ The little lies have fallen from me. I see now how right you were about me. If only I had known then — but I was little more than a child . . . ”

“ Yes! ” said the man-ghost wickedly in his own heart, “ it is true — you were but twenty-eight . . . ”

This was, no doubt, a little mean of the man-ghost — but then if only the reader could know all, he would understand.

“ You have changed too, ” said the woman-ghost, presently; “ your mouth is kinder; you too, I can see, have grown truer, more sincere . . . ”

The man-ghost did his best to look like a re-

formed character, and pressed her hand impressively. He said nothing, but his whole attitude was designed to convey that, indeed, life had at last purged the dross out of him and taught him the long lesson of the One Woman. As a matter of fact, it had, but it was by means of another woman that he had learnt it, the woman whom he had always loved — but deceived awhile. He was not deceiving her now, for he had told her of his having met the ghost, and the likelihood of his meeting her again. She was so secure in his love that she smiled at his vagaries and left him to go his way. Wise women are not wastefully jealous. They keep their jealousy for really important occasions.

Both ghosts were very delicate to avoid mention of the *status quo*, though by every indirect method of which their subtle brains were capable they sought to read each other's minds on the subject — with but little result. The woman-ghost, however, was intuitively aware of a certain stubborn loyalty to the other woman in the man-ghost's carefully chosen words and nimble evasions.

Thus in retrospective readjustments, stealthy reconnaissances of each other, and withal real joy in each other's recovered presence, the afternoon went by, and presently once more the time approached for the woman-ghost to dine in the real world.

“We cannot part like this,” said the two ghosts, “there is so much still to say.” So it was agreed that they should meet again on the morrow at the same place, at the same hour.

“You had better not come out with me,” said the woman-ghost at parting, for ghosts have a great objection to being seen together; so the man-ghost remained behind, and watched her figure through the window, and wondered if he could ever really love her again as he used to do.

Next day the two ghosts were comparatively punctual at the rendezvous. The woman-ghost was twenty minutes late, and the man-ghost twenty-five. Again they drank to “*Us*” through the sacramental straws, again their friend the waiter beamed upon their resurrection, again they talked of the past and tried in vain to wrest from each other the secret of the present, and again they were very happy, and again when the time came round for the engaged couple to dine together, nothing seemed to have been said.

So once more it was “To-morrow — at three” — and the man-ghost watched the woman-ghost through the window, and wondered. But he admired her frock.

Thus many days went by, and the two ghosts continued meeting each other according to their notions of three o'clock; and so much a custom had

their meetings become that they had almost forgotten that they were ghosts at all; and, certainly, any one seeing them together, seeing their close colloquies, and the way their eyes hung upon each other, would have had considerable difficulty in distinguishing them from real lovers. Each day the living blood seemed to be pouring into their shrunken veins, each day they grew less and less like phantoms.

There is no real ghost, I need hardly say, that does not own and haunt some buried treasure. Now both these ghosts possessed their buried treasure — treasure which three years ago they had professed to destroy. One day they had dared to ask each other concerning it.

“You did not really burn them?” said the man-ghost.

“No, I could not bear to, and never meant to. Did you?”

And the man-ghost said the same as the woman-ghost. And both told the truth, for in their way they had loved each other.

“O come and see my buried treasure,” said the woman-ghost, as the time came for parting.

“But . . .” the eyes of the man-ghost queried. “What of the dinner hour in the real world!”

As it chanced, the woman-ghost was free for this night; and as, day by day, the woman-ghost had

been growing more and more daring, they drove in a cab together, the two ghosts, to the place of the buried treasure — trusting perhaps also to the alleged invisibility of ghosts.

To drive in a cab again together was for them a separate bliss — poor disembodied spirits; and then at length they found themselves at the entrance of the apartment house at which in his carnal life the man-ghost had been so accustomed a presence. It was but natural that he should re-enter these once familiar doors with a thrill of memory. How strange it was to be there again, to find everything the same, the same clerks at the desk, as she went there to inquire for her mail. . . Yes! it was strange, and almost creepy, even for a ghost. When they came to the elevator, there was the same good boy David running it, who had been so kind — in exchange for dollar bills — in the old time. The good David almost fainted at the sight of the man-ghost.

“Why! I thought, sir . . .” he began, and stopped in time.

When they were out of the elevator, the woman-ghost explained that, David having so often inquired after the gentleman that came no more, she had calmly told him that the gentleman was dead. Hence David's natural surprise!

“It was true, was n't it?” she added.

“Ye-es,” answered the man-ghost, with an inward reflection on that old habit of unverity.

Then they entered the rooms he had once loved so well,—entered them by the same door,—the rooms that had once seemed like the shrine of some pure spirit, the dwelling-place of a fairy woman. The same rooms, the same furniture; a few more books, a few more photographs, the desk three years untidier—that was the only difference.

When they had closed the door, they stood a moment side by side looking at the place where they had both seemed so magically alive. Then they fell into each other’s arms, and kissed each other, and kissed each other again and again, and although they were ghosts, and engaged ghosts too, the kisses seemed wonderfully real, and anyone who could have seen them might well have wished to be a ghost—so happy they seemed revisiting thus the glimpses of the moon in each other’s company.

Neither of them could believe that they were there—together; yet in a moment the three years seemed to have vanished for both of them—though deep in their hearts they knew they were only ghosts. Still the sensation was very sweet of seeming to be really alive again together, and who shall blame them if they gave themselves up to it?

After a while the woman-ghost said: “Come,

let us look at our buried treasure," and she turned to a little urn-shaped box of seventeenth-century workmanship, made of wood covered with decorative shapes of beaten copper, and a fantastic lock of iron big enough to belong to the gate of a castle.

"I have two keys to this," she said; "here is one of them. Take it, and open the box for us, and then keep the key for ever. Here is my own key. No one so long as I live shall look inside this box but you and I. It belongs to us. It is our year. No future has any right over it . . ."

Then they placed the box between them on a divan, and the man-ghost set the key to the lock, and raised the lid, and the two looked in as into a grave — a grave filled with rose-leaves; and as the man looked, the tears came into his eyes, and he took the woman's face in his hands and kissed her very gently, and then they fell into each other's arms over the little grave and cried bitterly.

And anyone looking on would have said that this was the real sorrow of real people. But neither forgot in their hearts that they were ghosts.

When they had recovered themselves and were drying their eyes and trying to laugh away their foolishness, the man said:

"You make me believe that you did really love me, after all . . ."

"I loved you all the time," she answered, "it was you that failed."

Then she took up a folded paper from one of the little trays. It made a withered sound when she opened it.

"Do you remember the goldenrod along the road — that morning? Here is a piece of it."

And again she took a folded paper and opened it.

"Do you remember," she said, "that old desk you used to write on? Once when you were not looking I took a penknife and cut away a splinter of it. Here it is."

Can you wonder that the man-ghost felt his heart fill with tears?

"Did you really love me so much as that?" he said. "How grateful you make me — how happy!"

And then, one by one, the woman-ghost showed him the hoarded treasures of her heart. It was all too sacred to tell about; but there was nothing that bore the stamp of a moment's memory, however slight, that the woman had not saved, trifles inconceivably trivial, as well as little memorials heart-breakingly intimate.

The man-ghost almost forgot the personal relation of it all to himself in his reverence at this revelation of a woman's heart.

“To think,” he kept saying over and over — “to think that you loved me like that — and I never knew. How can I ever be grateful enough for this wonderful love that you gave me?”

So for a long while the two ghosts hung over their buried treasure, and at length placed each little memory back in its place, and locked the urn-shaped box, and with a sigh the man placed his key in his pocket, and the woman slipped hers into her bosom — and by this the clocks were striking eleven.

“I must go,” said the man, rising, but he lingered still a moment while the woman held him in her arms and kissed him passionately. When they came out of their kiss, breathless and laughing, the woman-ghost said:

“I am afraid this hardly looks as though we were ghosts.”

Yet for all that both knew that they were ghosts.

As the man-ghost walked home with a curious gravity in his heart, he suddenly thought of one incident of the evening the significance of which had not struck him at the time. While they were looking over those memories in the little chest, the woman-ghost had held up a piece of paper on which was written some verses.

“Do you remember this?” she asked.

He remembered well. "But where," he added, "is the letter that came with it? You seem to have torn it off"; and he pointed to the top of the paper which had evidently been cut with a pair of scissors.

"O that is down there among the other letters," she answered. "I wanted to have the poem by itself."

It was a slight incident, and at the moment he had given it no thought; but, as he walked home, his memory went back to it, and suddenly recalled what the letter had been which accompanied the verses. It had been a very tender letter, memorial of an occasion very sacred to both of them, but it had been for that very reason the kind of letter one would not care to see in an auction-room or an autograph-dealer's catalogue. Therefore the woman-ghost had destroyed it. Perhaps not unnaturally, but why had she not said so? Why had she said it was there with the other letters?

And so once more that shadow of unverity stole over the man-ghost's thoughts, and vitiated the sincerity of that afternoon.

In all these meetings the two ghosts still felt that they had more to say to each other, so still they continued meeting, and still each evening the woman-ghost returned to dinner in the real world. And so the beautiful days went by.

One day, as they sat together in their café, the woman-ghost said :

“Do you remember what day Monday will be?”

“The 18th of April,” answered the man-ghost, promptly. So much indeed the waiter could have told him; but as men-ghosts have exceedingly bad memories for anniversaries he immediately set to work trying to recall the significance of the 18th of April.

“Yes! but you remember what it means — what it once meant?”

“Do you really think I could possibly forget?” answered the man-ghost, with a certain reverential reticence of manner, as though, while the occasion was perfectly clear in his mind, it was one almost too sacred to recall in words. By such dumb show of feeling he succeeded in convincing the woman-ghost that the date was indeed green in his memory; the more so as she herself had her own reasons for not putting the date into words.

“Do you think we might spend the day in the country, as we did three years ago?” said the woman-ghost. “It would be doing no wrong to — anybody, would it?”

“Of course, it would n't. Ghosts cannot harm the living,” said the man-ghost. “The worst they can do is to haunt them. Let us go.”

"The spring is early this year," said the woman-ghost. "One feels it breathing already in the town. Even here the buds are thickening on the trees; but the country must already be leaf and blossom and birds."

"Let us go and teach the birds to sing," said the man-ghost.

"We might even teach them to fly," said the woman-ghost, laughing over the two straws daintily held in her lips, like pipes of some frail forgotten music.

"O winter of my heart — when comes the spring . . ."

the man-ghost began to recite in a low voice, half to himself;

"I am sore weary of these death-like days,  
This shroud unheaving of eternal snow —  
O winter of my heart — when comes the spring?"

"Whom did you write that to?" asked the woman-ghost, jealously. "It was not to me . . ."

"No, it was not to you, dear ghost," smiled the man, "it was to a living woman."

"Don't think of the living to-day," said the woman-ghost. "It is ungallant, at the very least."

"You are right," answered the other. "It was but a passing thought, and it is passed. Now, dear ghost, I am your own ghost again . . ."

"I wonder if you really love me," asked the woman-ghost.

"So much as one ghost can love another ghost," the man-ghost answered.

And then, looking at the clock, they saw that it was already the hour of the betrothed.

"Before you go, tell me in return if you really love me," asked the man-ghost.

"As much as a living woman can love a ghost," she answered, half sadly, half laughingly; and her skirts rustled away to leave the man-ghost pondering on the enigmatic reply. Suppose he should cease to be a ghost! Suppose she were really a living woman!

He watched her through the café window as she caught the car. One thing was certain. Her new spring hat was quite pretty.

On the morning of the 18th of April the two ghosts met very early at their café, and after first drinking through the straws very solemnly to the anniversary they were about to celebrate—but which, shame upon him! the man-ghost had in vain tried to place—they discussed their plans for the day.

"Shall we go—there?" said the woman-ghost.

The word "there" only deepened the mystery for the man-ghost, but he was able to say an appropriate thing.

“Do you think we dare?” he asked. “It is always such a terrible risk, revisiting places where one has been so happy.”

“Do you think we shall run any risk to-day?” asked the woman-ghost, looking at once fondly and searchingly into his face.

For answer the man-ghost looked at her a long, long look, and presently asked the waiter to order a hansom to take them to the Grand Central. He could remember the Grand Central — but what on earth was the name of the other station! For, you see, they had been so often in the country together, so often that New York State made a kind of Palestine, sown thick for them with holy places. But which was the holy place connected with April 18th? All the way in the cab the man-ghost was cudgelling his brains for the name of the place, but at length they arrived at the depot without his having been able to recall it. As he handed the woman-ghost out of the hansom, a desperate expedient occurred to him.

“I have just remembered a telegram I must send,” he said. “Do you mind getting the tickets while I send it?” and he pressed some money into her hand.

She went off gaily, poor little woman-ghost, and the man-ghost felt the awful wretch that he was — but is it the fault of man that he was not born with a woman’s memory for anniversaries?

Presently they met again. She handed him the tickets, and how eagerly he read them! Now, at all events, he knew the name of the station, but as they had been there together at least six times, he was still at a loss as to which visit they were about to celebrate. However, that was a mere detail, now that he knew the name of the place; and so they started off, happy as birds — for perhaps the deepest bond between them had always been their mutual love for what is usually called “nature,” a love peculiarly their own. They both knew others who loved “nature,” but no one quite as they loved it. The purest hours of companionship they had ever known had been out together in the fields and woods; and to be once more in the country together with the perilous intoxication of spring all around them, the vivid fountains of green leaves, piercingly fresh, the balm in the air, and O the birds! — was a happiness that made them forget awhile that they were only ghosts. So might two lost spirits escaped awhile from Hades into the upper air scent the sweet earth-smell of the mould, fill their arms with fragrant boughs, and passionately feed their eyes on the good sky.

“It is good to be here,” said the man; “let us build two tabernacles!”

“Two!” laughed the woman-ghost.

And, as by this they were in the ungossiping

wilderness, they took hands and ran together over the rocky meadows, for sheer joy in being there together under the sky.

At last they found the very meadows, the very rocks, overshadowed by the very trees, where they had been so happy that 18th of April. A stream had been running close by three years before. It was running still. All was just the same. And here they were once more, to complete the punctuality of nature. Only one object was missing from the landscape — a poor old consumptive horse that had neighed mournfully and sometimes startlingly far down the meadows, on the 18th of April, three years ago.

It was the woman-ghost's recalling this old horse that suddenly brought back to the man-ghost's mind the whole set of circumstances which beforehand he had been in vain trying to piece together. At last the anniversary was clear to him, and he could enter into its memorial rites without the sense of hypocrisy, or the fear of some disastrous blunder.

And, even with a defective memory for sentiment, it surely had been strange if the man-ghost had not responded to the vernal call of resurrection which breathed and piped and fluted and rippled all about them. The whole sunlit world was rising from the dead — might not these two dead ones

arise also, and once again be happy together in the sun? All too soon they must die the second death, from which there is no resurrection. Surely this day in the sun might be theirs, the last day they would ever spend in the spring sunshine together. Was it so very much to ask — so very much to steal!

The two ghosts sat side by side on a ledge of rock high up over the world. A great tree overshadowed them, and it was very cosy. Looking down, they could see all the coloured spring: farmhouses smothered in blossom, ploughed fields already vivid with the ascending blade, nooks and corners of meadow embroidered with flowers.

“It looks almost as if it might be the spring,” said the man, sadly, “the last spring.”

“The last . . .” queried the woman-ghost.

“I mean together,” answered the man, not with entire satisfaction to the woman-ghost.

Actually the man-ghost had made beautiful arrangements for all the springs that remained for him. He intended to spend them with the One Woman. But the occasion demanded a certain picturesque pessimism, and he lived up to the occasion.

“I think,” presently said the woman-ghost, who loved nothing so much as a literary allusion, “that Persephone must have felt as I do now when she

arose each year from the shades. How sweet to breathe again the smell of green leaves and the newly turned mould! How sweet to breathe it with you . . .”

“Properly speaking,” the man-ghost answered slyly, “you ought n’t to be breathing it with me; I mean, of course, in your character as Persephone. You should be breathing it with your mother, Ceres . . .”

“I love you even more than my mother,” said the woman-ghost, smiling.

“Your learned allusion,” said the man-ghost presently, “reminds me of something I forgot to say the other day when we opened that treasure-chest together. It was obvious enough, of course, and hardly worth mentioning. Indeed, I’m sure you thought of it yourself—thought, I mean, of the famous box of Pandora . . .”

“Of course I did . . . but shall I tell you what I chiefly thought of?”

“Do.”

“That, after all the superficial trouble occasioned by the opening of the box, after all the various plagues and vexations and dilemmas had made their escape, there was still Hope lying at the bottom of the box.”

In reply the man-ghost pressed the woman-ghost’s hand and looked a long look into her face,

which was his way of saying everything, yet saying nothing; and the woman-ghost, who, it must have been gathered, was no fool, was far from being deceived by this code method of saying nothing. She began to understand.

“I am hungry,” she said presently. “Suppose we open this Pandora’s basket.”

They had brought with them a little luncheon basket packed with dainties, and they laughingly unpacked it together.

“There is, you see, Hope at the bottom of the box,” said the man-ghost, lifting out a silver flask of considerable dimensions, which the woman-ghost had given him as a birthday present three years before. “See how faithful I am to you! Wherever I go, this goes with me.”

“Faithful creature, indeed!” laughed the woman-ghost. “I am so glad I chose something useful.”

They had no straws with them, so perforce they drank out of the flask together, as indeed they had drunk three years before. Then they turned to the various dainties, and ate heartily, and laughed together, and grew happier and happier each hour.

After they had been sitting together in silence for a long time, the woman-ghost said:

“Do you remember the Day of the Marguerites?”

That day the man-ghost did in very truth remember.

“Do you remember the Day of the Tower?”

That also he remembered.

“Do you remember the poem you wrote me about those two days?”

“I remember that I wrote a poem, but I cannot remember the poem.”

“I can,” said the woman-ghost, leaning against his shoulder. “Would you like me to say it to you?”

And then the woman-ghost recited as follows:

“Of all the days, we said that day was good

When, 'neath the blue publicity of heaven,  
Amid the flickering marguerites we stood,

And gave — or thought we gave — what once is given  
And only once is taken quite away;

But, child, since then how rich the months that passed  
With child-glad hours and many a perfect day,  
Nor maybe yet the happiest or the last.

“Yet, love, I wonder if the day we went

Up that high tower, and stood up in the sky,  
Yet unto earth returned again, was meant

To symbolise our love : nay, even I,  
In a dim-lighted, unbelieving hour,  
Have wondered if we really climbed the tower !”

“You were right,” she added, “we never climbed the tower”; and after a pause she whispered: “Is it yet too late?”

The man-ghost shook his head sadly: "Who knows!" he said.

"What are we to do?" said the woman-ghost, holding him more tightly in her arms.

"Time will show us what to do," answered the man-ghost, evasively.

"I believe in that no longer," she answered; "it is for us to tell Time what to do . . ."

"It will all come right . . ." said the man, cheerfully.

"I have ceased to believe in things coming right," said the woman, "unless we make them come right . . ."

At that moment the man-ghost, noting that the sky was becoming overshadowed with the approaching night, involuntarily took out his watch. It was later than he thought.

"My dear!" he said thoughtlessly, "I am sorry, but we must go at once, or we shall miss your train."

"I care nothing about trains, I care for nothing," the woman-ghost answered. "I love you only. I would rather miss my train than catch it . . ."

For answer the man-ghost took the silver flask by the bottom and held it with the neck downwards. It was empty.

"Dear little ghost," he said, "I understand. It

has been a wonderful spring day. The spring has turned our heads — but it must n't turn our hearts. You must catch your train."

In explanation of the conclusion, I must add that a ghost, however much it may love another ghost, is anxious above all things to be alive again, alive particularly in the social world. This it can only become by attaching itself to some living person, who will give it a simple undivided love. Now both these ghosts with which this story has dealt alike felt the need of such revivification. The man-ghost, as I have said, had never really been a ghost, for all the time another living woman had been feeding him with her heart's blood.

That was why the woman-ghost, when she first met him again, took him for a living man — and hoped to live again through him. And a living man indeed he was, for everyone else but her. For her only he was still a ghost.

Therefore, when she came to think over it, she was thankful that he had made her catch her train, and so arrive on time for dinner with her betrothed.

As for the man-ghost, he went back to the living woman; and she looked up at him and laughed:

“Well, how about the great anniversary?” she asked.

“We are finished,” he said, laughing; “we have died the second death. The ghosts have laid each other.”



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